



Empowered Employment:

*Unlocking the
Workplace for
Muslim Women*

Acknowledgements

This report (including the research underpinning this report and the research outputs) has generously been supported by the following organisations:



The principal researcher is indebted to **Muslim Women Connect** for its support during the research process and report publishing and launch processes. It is hoped that this research further informs and supports the work of MWC in continuing its tailored and targeted mentoring services for Muslim women.



Founded in 2018, the **Equality Act Review** is a campaign which is working with UK Parliamentarians to review and strengthen the Equality Act 2010 by evaluating whether the current remit of protected characteristics should be expanded, and assessing its implementation.

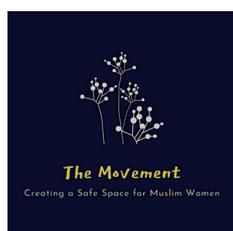
The campaign is looking closely at reviewing the religions and beliefs protected characteristic, and aims to employ this report to inform the reviewing of the Equality Act 2010 in this regard.



The principal researcher is indebted to Professor Marcia Inhorn at **Yale University** and Yale Macmillan Centre who has not only enabled the research to be conducted under her supervision during 2018-2019, but also supported the continuation of this research study in parallel form for British Muslim men, and American Muslims more broadly.



The principal researcher is also indebted her current institution, **SOAS University of London** where she lectures, for its ongoing support for the Muslim Women's Skills workshops series, a significant research output of this study, which she has designed and is delivering. In supporting this work, SOAS has become the first of any UK university to host and offer such targeted and tailored workshops for Muslim women.



The Movement is a group founded in 2020 at SOAS, University of London which aims to create a safe space for Muslim women to come together and share their personal, and professional experiences. The Movement is currently supporting the delivery of the Muslim Women's Skills workshops at SOAS, which are designed and delivered by the principal researcher, and which are a first for any UK university to be offering.

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Foreword

In 2019, we have seen the rise of Islamophobia and discrimination, alongside an increase in the number of hate crimes.

Harrowing figures have shown that the racist comments made by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who likened Muslim women to letterboxes and bank robbers, resulted in a 375% increase in hate crime across the UK, creating fear and anxiety among many British Muslims. Sadly, when taking a closer look at hate crime figures, a common theme arises. British Muslim women are much more likely to be victims of such heinous crimes. A recent report published by The Women and Equalities Committee on 'Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK' also notes the triple penalty suffered by Muslim women.

As Vice Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, I feel passionate about defending the rights of British Muslim women who so often face the brunt of Islamophobia. I fully welcome this timely report on Muslim women's experiences of work and career development. It provides key findings and explores in greater detail why Muslim women are at a distinct disadvantage, both socially and economically.

I know first-hand, as former Shadow Immigration Minister, the detrimental effects of a hostile environment. It is wholly disheartening to learn that nearly half of all participants experienced Islamophobia and discrimination in the workplace.

The aspirations, actions, and recommendations set out in this report will influence generations to come. We must overcome these challenges by offering streamlined career advice, increased opportunities (i.e. shadowing, internships, and mentoring), and focus on confidence building.

As this report underscores, it is essential that we work with our educational, political, and civil institutions, as well as employers, to become champions of diversity and inclusion for British Muslims. Civil society, including trade unions and workers' movements, must remain a bedrock for all our endeavours. This report is well researched and disrupts the status quo, particularly in its approach to providing practical solutions.

There is no place for discrimination, and it is simply unfair that one's faith, race or gender should dictate their career opportunities. Together we can usher in a new era that is more just, robust, and inclusive for all.

Afzal Khan MP, Shadow Foreign Minister



Afzal Khan MP, Shadow Foreign Minister



Principal Researcher

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Author Bio

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Author Note

"This report is the result of an eighteen-month research project exploring British Muslim women's experiences of work and career development. With 425 survey responses and 50 one-to-one interviews conducted, this is the most comprehensive study in the world, that has embarked on such a task (as far as we are aware). The research findings demonstrate a real need for tailored mentoring and development work to inspire and empower British Muslim women, in the workplace. It is hoped that this research influences 'best-practice' in the workplace across all industries and sectors, and informs policy at the governmental, institutional, and organisational levels, on matters relating to women, equality, and diversity and inclusion."

To cite this report or any of its content please use the following format:

Bi, S. 2020. Empowered Employment: Unlocking the Workplace for Muslim Women. *Muslim Women Connect*.

Executive Summary

1. The research project took to explore Muslim Women's experiences of work and career development. The project aimed to better understand potential challenges that may be prohibiting Muslim women (which could then be mitigated), and positive factors that may be assisting Muslim women's development (which could be amplified). It is hoped that the research project facilitates positive and real social change for British Muslim women.
2. The research consisted of a mixed-methods approach employing an electronic survey to capture both qualitative and quantitative data, and semi-structured interviews that captured life history narratives and Muslim women's experiences of work and career development, in greater detail.
3. The research spanned between April 2018 and August 2019.
4. 425 women completed the survey and 50 in depth interviews were conducted.
5. Muslim women who participated in the research hailed from diverse backgrounds including diverse identity markers such as ethnicity, race, age, region, and socioeconomic status.
6. This is the largest and most comprehensive study of its kind to be conducted on Muslim women's experiences of work and career development anywhere in the world.

Key Findings

7. Almost half of all participants' (46.8%) household incomes were below the 2018 national average household income of £28,400 (Office for National Statistics: 2019).
8. 41.6% of participants received free school meals, while 58.4% participants stated not having been in receipt of free school meals.
9. Despite almost half of participants having been raised in households below the average household income, 48.2% of participants had completed an undergraduate degree, and a further 43% of participants had postgraduate qualifications.
10. 84.2% of British Muslim women were actively engaged in the labour market and contributing to the economy, suggesting that Muslim women are highly competent and skilled.
11. More than half of participants (53.4%) found employment within three months of completing their studies.
12. Participants were involved in a wide range of industries with 20.5% in education and teaching, 17.9% in healthcare, 9.2% in charity and voluntary services, 8.5% in administration, business and management, 8% in government and policy, 6.6% in research, and 4.7% in financial services.
13. When compared to the industries women aspired to enter whilst at secondary school, the results showed large discrepancies for industries such as journalism and media, medicine, and law.

14. While 79 participants wanted to enter the medical field in secondary school, only 1 participant entered the field as a doctor. Similarly, while 46 participants wanted to become lawyers, only 12 became lawyers upon graduating university, and while 39 participants wanted to become journalists and/or enter the media profession, only 7 entered the profession.
15. A major challenge to work and career development was a lack of confidence which 54.3% of participants selected. The second major challenge experienced was a lack of career advice with 47.8% of participants having made this selection. The third major factor was the lack of opportunity, with 43.5% of participants making this selection.
16. Participants also selected lack of information resources (32%), family expectations (28.7%), partner expectations (5.2%), Islamophobia (17.6%), discrimination (29.6%), difficult working relations (18.8%), disability (4%), personal circumstances (19.3%), and health (12%), also as barriers.
17. 78% experienced more than one challenge; a significant finding that illustrates the sheer difficulty Muslim women experience in pursuing career and work development.
18. 47.2% of women stated they had encountered Islamophobia and discrimination as a challenge in the workplace.
19. 33.9% of participants stated that family and partner expectations were barriers to their career development.
20. Participants were asked about helpful resources. 66% participants selected mentoring and advice, 65% participants selected greater understanding/openness from employers, 47% participants selected greater understanding/openness from colleagues, 27% selected targeted schemes from employers, 43% participants selected paid internships/work experience, 44% participants selected shadowing in the workplace, 70% participants selected networking opportunities, and 5% participants selected 'other'.

Key Recommendations

21. In order to address and mitigate the negative impacts of these factors for British Muslim women, strategies to combat must be well-thought out, specific, and targeted.
22. *For Muslim women Support organisations such as Muslim Women Connect:* Offer streamlined mentoring services that include paid internships, shadowing in the workplace and networking sessions that focus on building networking skills, would make a significant positive impact. It is paramount that these mentoring opportunities extend to cities across the UK to ensure the 'North/South divide' is not being reinforced through the provision of services in London only.
23. *For education providers:* The research demonstrates a loss of talent between the ages of 14-22. There is an urgent need for tailored mentoring and development programs between these ages.

Education providers (secondary schools, sixth forms, and universities) are urged to invest in the development of their students who identify as Muslim women by offering targeted careers advice, information on a diverse range of careers, and engaging the families of students, providing families information as to the wide variety of possible career trajectories.

24. *For employers and workplaces:* A major obstacle highlighted in the workplace was the alcohol culture, which dominated networking events in particular. Workplaces are urged to instill a culture where it is acceptable to network over non-alcoholic beverages. Workplaces are also encouraged to offer nuanced and tailored diversity and inclusion training to expose their workforce to the range of conscious and unconscious biases. Employers can also increase the accessibility of flexible working as an option for Muslim women. Employers are also urged to issue clear guidelines as to behaviours that constitute as Islamophobic, anti-Muslim, and/or racist.

Key Solutions

25. For education providers to hold careers events for Muslim women where they and their families can be informed about the diversity of career trajectories.
26. Employers and workplaces could hold networking events and meetings where soft drinks and coffees are served. If such events take place outside the workplace that they be held at coffee-shops and/or alcohol-free restaurants.
27. Employers must issue clear guidelines as to the behaviours that constitute as Islamophobic, anti-Muslim, and/or racist and to ensure that these guidelines are read by each employee. Employers must also categorise and treat such abuse as forms of 'gross misconduct', and take the relevant steps to address such incidents.
28. In parallel to this, employers must offer support services for employees that have been affected by Islamophobic abuse, and instill a positive and assisted culture of reporting such abuse.
29. Employers across industries and sectors are urged to adopt 'name-blind' application processes where names of participants are anonymised.
30. Funding must be made available from both government and non-governmental organisations to deliver tailored mentoring services on a national scale.



1. Introduction

Recent data suggests that British Muslim women are performing well academically (Khattab and Modood: 2018) but remain economically inactive in significant numbers (Garratt: 2016, Demos: 2015). At the same time levels islamophobia, anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-immigrant sentiment have intensified in recent years (Bi: 2019), resulting in increased attacks on Muslims, particularly visibly practicing Muslim women (Abu-Lughod: 2002, Dwyer: 1999, Tarlo: 2007, Afshar: 2008, Haddad: 2007, Chakraborti and Zempi:, Jiwani: 2005, Perry: 2014, Ipsos Mori: 2017). As a result, Bi (2019) argues that sociological theories of 'multiple jeopardy' (King: 1988) - also often referred to as double or triple penalty - mistakenly provide equal weight to identity markers such as ethnicity, race, class, and gender, which intersect to impose heightened levels of unfavourable conditions for minority women, particularly in the labour market. Given the high rates of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment, she argues instead, that religion has become the heavier weighted factor in the equation of intersectionality for Muslims, resulting in a religio-sociocultural capital that operates to the disadvantage of Muslims (Bi: 2019). Other data sets include high rates of poverty amongst British Muslims with figures suggesting that 50% of Muslims live in the bottom 10% of social housing in the UK (Modood: 2006), and British Muslims on average earn £350 less each month compared to members of any other religious group (Heath and Li: 2015).

With these factors in mind, the Principal Researcher, Dr Suriyah Bi and Muslim Women Connect (MWC) set out to explore the work and career development experiences of British Muslim women, in order to learn about the factors helping and hindering Muslim women. With this information, it is hoped that community organisations such as MWC, organisations, educational institutions can be assisted in developing initiatives and strategies both internally and through informing and shaping policies, in order to ensure Muslim women can achieve their maximum potential.

The research project employed a mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to ensure that broad, in-depth, and nuanced insights reflecting the experiences of Muslim women are captured, as numbers alone are unable to provide a micro-level analysis. This approach allowed for the acknowledgement and appreciation for the diversity in Muslim women's experiences, which unlocked unintended findings such as the experiences of Muslim women and the search for spouses, which for some women who took part in the research, could have had disastrous consequences for their work and career trajectories, and therefore their contributions to society. The research involved a survey from which quantitative data was collated from the 425 responses received, and in-depth interviews that were conducted with 50 women.

The report is organised as follows; literature review, methodology, findings, looking towards the future, and conclusions. The report makes a significant contribution to the ongoing study of British Muslims and will form part of a post doctorate research project at Yale University led by the principal researcher, and which also includes the exploration of British Muslim men's experiences of work and career development; a much-needed mirror investigation as British Muslim women's progress cannot be truly achieved without the simultaneous progress of British Muslim men.

2. Literature Review

Introduction

In 2016, the then Prime Minister David Cameron issued a statement in which he referred to Muslim women as severely lacking in English proficiency, employing this in the framing of his argument that ethnic minority communities were failing to integrate into British society, and by extension to the wider debate on 'worthy citizenship' (Mason and Sherwood: 2016). There was an equally weighted backlash to the Prime Minister's remarks from the Muslim community including a plethora of Muslim organisations, and politicians such as Tim Farron (the then Liberal Democrat Leader), and Andy Burnham (the then Shadow Home Secretary), who referred to his remarks as 'dog-whistle politics' (Mason and Sherwood: 2016)¹. Such remarks rendered invisible achievements of British Muslim women who were excelling academically and contributing to the economy in plethora of ways.

These remarks did however expose the depth of the prejudice and discrimination experienced by Muslim women who were unable to, it seemed, escape the orientalist and Eurocentric (Said: 2001) view of their power and agency. Such reductive and narrow view points can perpetuate further stereotypes of and about Muslim women, which can be, and are proving to be detrimental to Muslim women's personal and professional development(s). One of the central aims of this report is to breakdown such harmful stereotypes of Muslim women. In order to do so, the report aims to provide meaningful data and research that can illustrate the current landscape of Muslim women achievement, and the barriers and obstacles experienced, if any, which can help inform initiatives to help Muslim women overcome these, and thereby excel in work and career development. To lay a foundation for the research aims and objectives, in this chapter we outline current and past literature on Muslim women's work and career development, including difficulties they are known to experience.

British Muslim Women as a Demographic

More than a third of British Muslims are under the age of fifteen and nearly two thirds under thirty (Janmohamed: 2016, 7). In their recent report titled 'British Muslims in Numbers', the Muslim Council of Britain found there are 1.3 million British Muslim women and that they make up 43% of all full-time Muslim students. The youthful nature of the population has led to some such as Shelina Janmohamed to coin terms such as 'Generation M', in an attempt to capture the way in which Muslims are immersed in modern life while they uphold their faith. It is argued that women within 'Generation M' strongly believe in the right to equal participation, equal respect, and to be able to hold a full role in society (Janmohamed: 2016, 3). The terms of their participation however, are determined autonomously rather than being rooted in the goals of what can be seen as, 'western feminism' (ibid).

However, the intense scrutiny placed on Muslims both at the national and international level following 9/11, 7/7, the recent Manchester arena bombing (May 2017), the Westminster (March 2017), the London bridge attacks (June 2017), the Trojan Horse affair (Birmingham 2013-2017), the protests from pockets of the Muslim community against the 'No Outsider's Program' that teaches LGBTQ+ to primary school children (2019), all have brought into question the way in which Muslim women experience and perform their role in society as per Janmohamed's (2016) argument. A number of studies have explored the complexity surrounding the identity of British Muslim women, who in some cases are visibly Muslim as they wear the hijab (Basit: 1997, Dwyer: 1999, Haw: 2009, Poynting: 2009, Wagner et.al. 2012, Bi: 2018, 2019). Such studies also discuss the shifts in attitudes that Muslim women have experienced post-9/11 and 7/7 in particular, which have led scholars, activists, and politicians, to highlight the rise of Islamophobia, and most recently call for a definition of Islamophobia to be adopted by Parliament (APPG British Muslims: 2018).

¹ www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/18/david-cameron-stigmatising-muslim-women-learn-english-language-policy

Nonetheless, there has been an increase in the number of young Muslim women interacting with the world and contributing to society whilst asserting their identity through their religion. Research has shown that being able to express their identity at their workplace results in personal and professional benefit for employees, which translates into organisational benefit (Heliot et.al: 2019). However, in light of the rising islamophobia, it is important to question how the religious identity of Muslim women manifests in the work place and its impact on the work and career development of Muslim women.

Academic Achievements

Studies exploring the academic achievements of Muslims have largely been collated through the lens of ethnic stratifications of minority communities in the UK (Afshar: 1989a, 1989b; cf. Brah & Shaw: 1992; Brah, 1993, 1996, Modood: 2006, Thapar: 2010, Ijaz and Abbas: 2010). Only recently has a concerted effort been made to collate data based on the religious identities of minority communities, which is a response to the increasing levels of Islamophobia in multiple forms, towards British Muslims (Bi: 2019). Broadly speaking, ethnic minorities in Britain have been associated with educational underachievement (Modood: 2006). Muslim men in particular are associated with higher rates of underachievement, criminality, and demonization (Alexander: 2001), while Muslim women have been portrayed as being subjected to patriarchal and cultural norms (Ahmed: 2001, Dwyer: 2000).

Although recent data suggests that participation of Muslims in Higher Education continues to rise rapidly (Modood and Calhoun: 2015), and ethnic minorities represent almost one in six of home undergraduates in the England (Modood: 2006), there are still several barriers experienced by ethnic minorities in accessing higher education - particularly the most prestigious universities (Boliver: 2016, 247) - as a result of which universities have been called on to do more to address barriers (Malik: 2018). A significant barrier that shapes educational and life outcomes is socio-economic background, with British Asian Muslims being amongst the most disadvantaged of the ethnic minorities. 60% of British Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are in poverty compared to 20% of Whites, and have the highest proportions of school leavers without any qualifications (Modood: 2006). Academic research has consistently shown that British Muslims face considerably high levels of economic disadvantage than other groups in Britain. Figures suggest that 50% of Muslims live in the bottom 10% of social housing in the UK. While some have argued that identity markers such as socio-economic status, gender, and ethnicity intersect to form barriers to educational attainment (Seta: 2016), others have argued that religious identity can outweigh other identity markers due to the rise of Islamophobia, and religious based discrimination (Bi: 2019).

The 2011 national census shows that there were 329,694 Muslims in full time education, of whom female Muslim students made up 43 % (Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), 2015). A further 24% of the Muslim population (age 16 and above) have a degree-level or above qualifications (Ali: 2016a). The 2011 census also demonstrated that while in 2001 39% of Muslims had no qualifications, in 2011 this dropped to 26% (MCB, 2015), suggesting an improvement in access to higher education for British Muslims, and increased educational attainment. A recent qualitative analysis by Stevenson et al's (2017:3) has suggested that some Muslim students have unequal access to prestigious universities due to geographical provision, discrimination at the point of entry, or self-limiting choices rooted in fears of being in a minority. Overall however, a longitudinal study conducted by Khattab and Modood (2018) shows that once previous school performance is considered, Muslim students seem to be performing as well as the majority group, even in attending Russell group universities. In particular, Muslim women seem to be outperforming Muslim men, especially in relation to their school performance (ibid). To add, it was also shown that both parental and students' own expectations play an important role in determining attainment levels.

British Muslims in Employment

Post-education employment figures show that British Muslims experience a greater economic disadvantage than any other group in the UK (Parliament, 2016). The level of unemployment for Muslims is more than double that of the overall population (12.8% compared to 5.4%), 41% of whom are economically inactive, compared to 21.8% of the general population (ibid:5). Amongst those who are employed, British Muslims are severely underrepresented in higher occupations with only 6% holding senior positions, which is the lowest figure of all religious groups in the UK (Garratt: 2016, Demos: 2015). Furthermore, British Muslims on average earn £350 less each month compared to members of any other religious group (Heath and Li: 2015). A number of complex reasons can explain this data including discrimination and Islamophobia, stereotyping, pressure from families, a lack of tailored advice around higher education choices, and insufficient role models across education and employment (Garratt: 2016, Demos: 2015). British Muslim women in particular, are said to experience a 'triple penalty' (see also King: 1988, Bi: 2019) due to the intersecting identity markers of gender, ethnicity and religion, which reflects the significant number of Muslim women (65%) who are economically inactive. (Garratt: 2016, Demos: 2015).

Despite the somewhat improving educational attainment levels amongst British Muslims, evidence suggests that minorities including British Muslims are still being held back in the job market. According to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (2016), Black, Asian and ethnic minority workers with degrees are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than White workers with degrees. Furthermore, studies published by the Women and Equalities Committee (2016) suggest those who adhere to the faith of Islam are further penalised. As a result, Bi (2019) argues that religious identity has become a negative socio-cultural capital that works against British Muslims. It is important therefore to be able to analyse the ways in which this negative socio-cultural capital can impact Muslims in their work and career development and ultimately, their social mobility.

A report by the Government's Social Mobility Commission (Stevenson et. al: 2017) found that widespread Islamophobia, racism and discrimination increasingly punctuate Muslim men and women's professional and career development. This is despite the strong work ethic and high resilience amongst Muslims that result in outstanding academic results. A number of barriers to success have been identified in the report (Stevenson et.al: 2017), which include minority ethnic-sounding names that act as a barrier to securing a job interview, Muslim women who wear headscarves subjected to discrimination in the workplace, teachers expecting less from minority ethnic and/or Muslim students and thus invest fewer time and resources to benefit their education, and a lack of role models or Muslim staff in schools. Young Muslims also described a culture of drinking alcohol at work that they were unable to participate in, having to apologise to colleagues every time there was a terrorist incident, and expressed that they considered changing their names to increase their likelihood of being able to acquire jobs. The report's findings resonated with the findings of a BBC investigation, which found that a job seeker with an English sounding name was offered three times the number of interviews than a candidate with a Muslim sounding name (BBC: 2017). Similarly, a report by the Department of Work and Pensions (Wood et.al: 2009), found that ethnic minority applicants were discriminated against in favour of white applicants in 29% of cases.

Aspects of the labour market can often resemble a gated community, as job opportunities often come with networks. Muslims have the lowest participation rate in civic and community organisations of all other religious groups (Garratt: 2016). As a result, it is ever more crucial for young Muslims to participate in civil and community organisations, through which opportunities to connect with those outside their immediate social network, can present. Organisations such as Mosaic, Operation Black Vote, and Muslim Women Connect are paving the way forward in this sphere by providing networking and mentoring opportunities for BAME individuals. However, name-blind recruitment, educating employers of their legal duties towards employees especially around the Equality Act 2010, and empowering Muslims to

challenge discrimination (Stevenson et.al: 2017), would be a welcome step to help further facilitate social mobility and equal opportunity for Muslims.

Indicators of British Muslim Women's experiences of work and career development

A 2017 report by Ipsos Mori found that prejudice against Muslims is felt to be increasing, especially Muslim graduates and young Muslims (Ipsos Mori: 2017, 8). Survey results demonstrated that 63% of Muslims from minority ethnic groups think there is greater prejudice against Muslims than any other religious group, and 27% said they had experienced discrimination, which rises to 34% for graduates and young Muslims aged between 18-24. Furthermore, one in four Muslims (26%) stated they worried about being physically attacked (Ipsos Mori: 2017, 8). Significant to the debate on prejudice and discrimination towards Muslims had been the visibility of Muslim women due to their decision to veil (Abu-Lughod: 2002, Dwyer: 1999, Tarlo: 2007, Afshar: 2008, Haddad: 2007, Chakraborti and Zempi:, Jiwani: 2005). Kapur (2002) in particular notes that the visibility of Muslim women in contemporary Western society disrupts the order of normality that exists within them. Muslim women are feared, and seen as the enemy within due to not fitting in to the western ideal of womanhood (Perry: 2014). Here, the symbolism of the veil (hijab and/or niqab) is crucial, as it is not only taken as a sign of submissiveness but also as a sign of Islamic aggression (Perry: 2014). Covered women are thus represented as 'agents' of terrorism (Perry: 2014) and as warrior terrorists alongside male counterparts who are ready to wage war on the West (Aziz: 2012, Perry: 2014). In this way, the hermeneutics of dress controls the way in which Muslims are able to perform and experience public spaces, and life in 'western' society. As a result, academics such as Mirza (2009) have argued that the headscarf and/or veil is experienced as a 'second skin'.

Exacerbating this further is the structural disempowerment Muslim women experience due to the multiple subjectivities they occupy, often being simultaneously oppressed by their class, gender, ethnic, racial and religious position (Perry: 2014, Aziz: 2012, 25, Bullock and Jafri: 2002, 35, Zine: 2006, Bi: 2019). Abu Ras and Suarez (2009) highlight the complex nature of Muslim's women's positionality as working to disadvantage them in the educational, financial and social resources (Bianchi et.al: 1996, Essers and Benschop: 2009), which increases their vulnerability to violence. Coset et. al (2013) found that 58% of the 585 Islamophobic incidents reported between 1 April 2012 and 30 April 2013 were against women, of which 80% identified as visibly Muslim. These figures are resonant with data from Europe where visibly Muslim women are the victims of street hate crime (Runneymede: 1997). The forms of abuse were found to range from verbal abuse, spitting, having headscarves or face veils torn from them, harassment, aggressive or threatening behaviour, violence and physical harm (Allen: 2014). Such data echoes Chakraborti and Zempi's (2012) observation that veiled Muslim women are neither seen nor heard. Together, these reflections form a powerful indicator of Muslim women's experiences of work and career development to be largely punctuated with Islamophobic stereotypes and abuse, something which requires closer investigation.

Conclusion

The aim of this literature review was to provide a comprehensive overview of the research that has been conducted on the experiences of Muslim women in Britain. The studies and research discussed in this chapter demonstrate there to be at the very least, an unfavorable climate towards Muslims in many social contexts, and particularly for visibly practicing Muslim women. Given the data available that suggests low rates of employment for Muslim women despite their high levels of educational attainment, it is necessary to investigate and obtain nuanced accounts of the experiences of Muslim women regarding their work and career development(s). Based on the findings, if necessary, initiatives can then be devised to address any issues that may be limiting Muslim women's work and career development.



3. Methodology

Three key aims were central to this research project: to conduct research into Muslim Women's experiences of work, career, and personal and professional developments in order to better inform and shape the direction of community, organisational, and institutional efforts; to become a beacon for research on Muslim women's experiences of work, career, personal and professional development; and to facilitate positive and real social change for Muslim women by informing policy. The research consisted of a mixed-methods approach employing an electronic survey to capture quantitative data, but which had qualitative elements by way of questions which allowed for quantitative answers, and semi-structured interviews which captured life history narratives, and experiences of work and career development. The research spanned between April 2018 and August 2019.

Survey

The survey was designed using Google Forms and comprised of nineteen questions, which were organised under three categories; background questions, experiences at work, and further participation and sharing. Background questions included 'what is your age group?', 'what is your ethnicity?', 'which part of the UK are you from?', 'please state the highest earning parent's income at the age of 14', 'did you receive free school meals?', 'please describe your highest level of education, 'which industry did you most aspire to work in when you were in secondary school?', 'please state your current working status', 'how long after completing your studies did you find employment?', 'which industry best describes your employment?'. The aim of this cluster of questions was to capture information regarding participants' socioeconomic background, geographical locations, ethnic identity, in order to account for intersectionality theory.

The second cluster of questions was designed to fulfill the core research aim of exploring Muslim women's experiences of work and career development. Under this theme, the following questions were asked: 'please state what you have found to be most helpful during your career development', 'please select more than one if applicable', 'what, if any are the major challenges you experienced when making career choices? Please select more than one if applicable', 'have you experienced any form of discrimination in the work place and/or work-related environment?', 'if you answered yes to the above question, please describe the nature of discrimination', 'please provide as much information as possible', 'in your view, what can be done to improve Muslim Women's experiences of work and career development? Please select more than one if applicable'. This cluster of questioning allowed for qualitative responses in order to provide nuance to experiences of discrimination if any were experienced.

The final cluster of questions focused on further participation in the research and sharing of the survey. Questions asked included: 'would you be interested in participating in a one-to-one interview and/or focus groups?', 'if you answered yes to the above, please could you leave your name and email address below. These will be treated in full confidence and will not be passed to any third parties', 'is there someone you could share this survey with who would identify with the issues being discussed?', 'is there anything else you would like to add?'. The aim of this cluster of questions was to enable increased engagement with Muslim women both in quantity and quality (through one-to-on interviews).

A total of 443 responses to the survey were received. However, the report relies on 425 responses, as the first 18 responses were omitted due to further questions being added after the survey went live. The majority of the survey responses were received between April 2018- August 2018, as during this time MWC and the principal researcher concentrated efforts to appeal to participants by sharing the survey on social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), and by emailing and texting (using WhatsApp) the survey link to Muslim women within both the researcher's and MWC's networks. The researcher

was conscious about receiving a skewed cohort of responses geographically limited to London, as MWC operate in London. This is due to a plethora of studies that suggest that the 'North' of England is more deprived of social resources and opportunities leading to a lack of social mobility and poorer social outcomes. As a result, a conscious effort was made to send survey links to individuals within the researcher's and MWC's networks, that were geographically located outside of London. Similarly, since South Asians make up the majority of British Muslims, the researcher made conscious efforts to ensure that the study was widely disseminated amongst the British Muslim community to attract participation from a diverse range of ethnicities and racial backgrounds. Social media proved to be an effective tool that enabled a wider reach, thereby mitigating London and/or South Asian centric findings.

Semi-structured Interviews

Between September 2018 and August 2019, a total of fifty semi-structured interviews were conducted with Muslim women via skype or telephone. Interviews were conducted with women who had expressed in the survey that they were willing to participate in the research further. Those who had provided their email addresses were contacted via email and were provided an information sheet and consent form (see also Makenzie et.al: 2007: 306-307). Once the consent form had been returned, and a suitable time and day arranged, interviews were conducted via Skype, WhatsApp wi-fi, or telephone call, and calls lasted between one to two hours. Interviews were conversational in style to allow participants the space to share their experiences without the rigidity of structured interviews. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked whether they had any questions as to the research, and in most cases, a brief overview of the research was provided once more to ensure they understood the aims and objectives of the research (see also Makenzie et.al: 2007: 301). It was also stressed that participants did not have to answer questions they did not wish to answer, and that they could opt out of the interview at any point without providing a reason.

During interviews, broad themes were introduced such as 'tell me about your background and your educational trajectory', which participants answered with minimal prompts. However, in instances where the researcher felt that further information was required such questions as 'can you tell me about your subject choices at sixth form?' to gauge further detail, were asked. Such broad questioning as an approach, also provided a foundation upon which questions specific to career experiences such as 'what inspired you to choose those subjects', 'did you receive any guidance or advice when picking your subjects?', which led on to questions such as 'what role did mentors play in your career development?' Additional themes that were also explored included familial and/or community pressures, experiences at work, experiences of discrimination (if any), resources that were helpful, resources that were unavailable but would have been helpful, future career aspirations and goals and how these can be achieved and/or what resources will be necessary. Participants were provided opportunities to ask questions, and before the closure of the interview, they were provided an opportunity to share additional experiences and/or thoughts that they had not previously mentioned during the interview.

Analysis

The survey design allowed for the data captured to be analysed instantly through visual pie charts and graphs, which will be presented in the results section of the report. The semi-structured interviews required a greater level of analysis however. Strategies employed to analyse qualitative interviews included highlighting certain keywords in the interview transcriptions and/or notes, and identifying broad themes. For instance, unintended themes identified during the interview stage included balancing future family life commitments and current experiences of marriage and dating, both of which were determining Muslim women's current experiences of work and career development. Although semi-structured interviews were qualitative, there was an element of statistical analysis involved to capture data such as the percentage of those interviewed who experienced Islamophobia and/or discrimination at work.

Ethical Considerations

The principal researcher has received extensive ethics training throughout her academic trajectory. This includes social science research and methods training at the University of Oxford, School of Oriental and African Studies, University College London, and Yale University. At all these institutions, the principal researcher has successfully acquired ethics permission by their respective Research Ethics Committees for various research projects. Additional courses and training such as the Protecting Human Research course developed by the NIH Office of Extramural Research, and the HSCIC's Information Governance Course have been undertaken and successfully passed by the researcher. Drawing on insights gained throughout these processes, the researcher employed an ethical conduct for the safety and protection of both the informants and herself (vicarious traumatising for example), and in the research was handled and collected. For instance, all handwritten notes were anonymised and recordings of interviews (where permission had been provided) were deleted upon their transcription. A considerable proportion of the abovementioned courses were dedicated to the Data Protection Act (1998), with which the project was consistent, as well as with the upcoming General Data Protection Regulations which, in May 2018, replaced the Data Protection Act 1998.

In light of this extensive training, the principal researcher took care to ensure that the highest ethical standards were employed during the research. At the outset of the research, the design of the study incorporated ethical considerations in that survey responses were anonymous, and 'further participation' in semi-structured interviews after the completion of the survey were optional, and the provision of email addresses at the end of the survey, were not a requisite for the submission of the survey. For participants who expressed interest in taking part in semi-structured interviews, a participant information sheet and consent form were sent to them by email. Once consent forms were returned, a date and time to conduct the interview were scheduled. During semi-structured interviews, the researcher took care to ensure that participants were provided ample opportunities to ask questions at any point during the interview and were informed that they were not required to answer questions they were uncomfortable with, without having to explain why. Participants were also made aware that they could opt out of the interview at any point without providing a reason. An unintended finding that emerged during interviews and that gave rise to further ethical considerations, was the mental health of participants. Some participants referred to and discussed their mental health, as a result of which the researcher asked participants whether they were safe, whether their GPs were aware of their mental health experiences, and whether they had contact details of a mental health provider. While all participants answered positively to these questions, the researcher was prepared to make the relevant bodies aware of participants' mental health and/or safety, if required. The participants were also provided information of a list of organisations and useful websites that participants could contact for help with their mental health.

Presentation of Results

The principal researcher is a social anthropologist and human geographer by training and adopts feminist ethnography (see Lughod: 1990) and intersectionality as methods across her research activities. As a result of these methodological frameworks, it was important to the principal researcher to ensure the voices of the participants were central to this research. A conscious effort has therefore been made to interweave within the text, participant case studies and excerpts from interviews. Further, as a Muslim woman the researcher was aware of her own complaints about being 'spoken for' and thus, did not wish to impose this very behaviour when analysing and presenting the research. Feminist ethnography and intersectionality theory were thus key guiding frameworks that have shaped the presentation of the research, and that have enabled for the accounting of a number of sensitivities around Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and women's representation(s).



4. Findings

The research findings will be presented under two key strands; background data and challenges and obstacles. Under each theme, both survey data and excerpts from interviews will be employed, which will enable simultaneously, a snapshot of nuanced accounts of individual experiences. This approach to presenting the research findings is a deliberate choice, advocating that Muslim women are a diverse cohort and have a range of experiences. In other words, while statistical data is powerful in indicating group behaviours, it is the nuanced accounts of individual experiences of Muslim women that provides them with agency and personhood. It is this approach that is inspired by anthropological and specifically, ethnographic research methods, that the principal researcher would like to stress is crucial to better understanding the experiences of Muslim women, in mainstream society.

4.1 Background Data

The survey was completed by a diverse group of participants who identified with an array of intersectional identity markers. The chart below demonstrates that almost 30% of Muslim women were between 21 and 25 years of age, 23% were between 26 and 30 years of age, and approximately 21% of participants were between 31 and 35 years of age. Thus, 72.8% of participants were between the ages of 18 and 35.

Chart 1: % of participants by age group

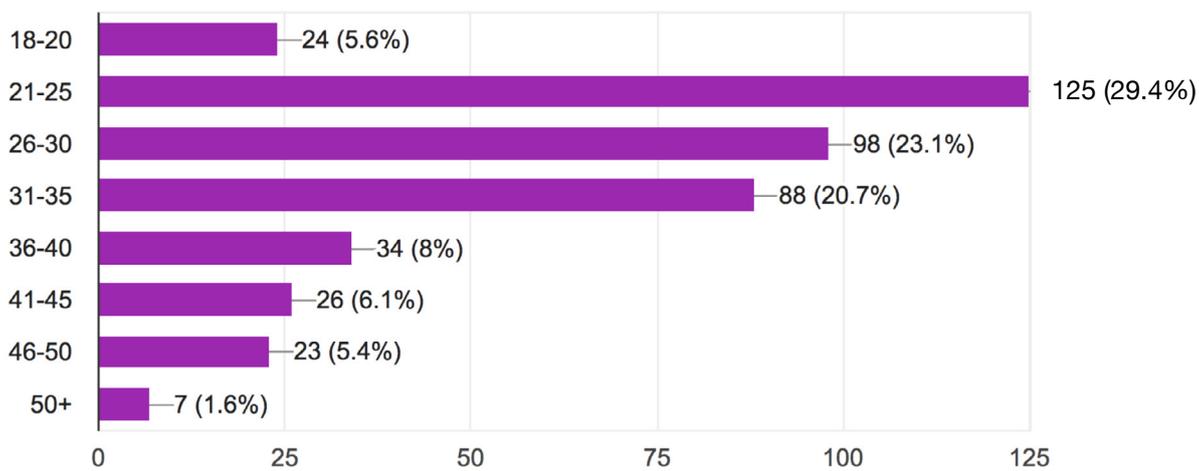
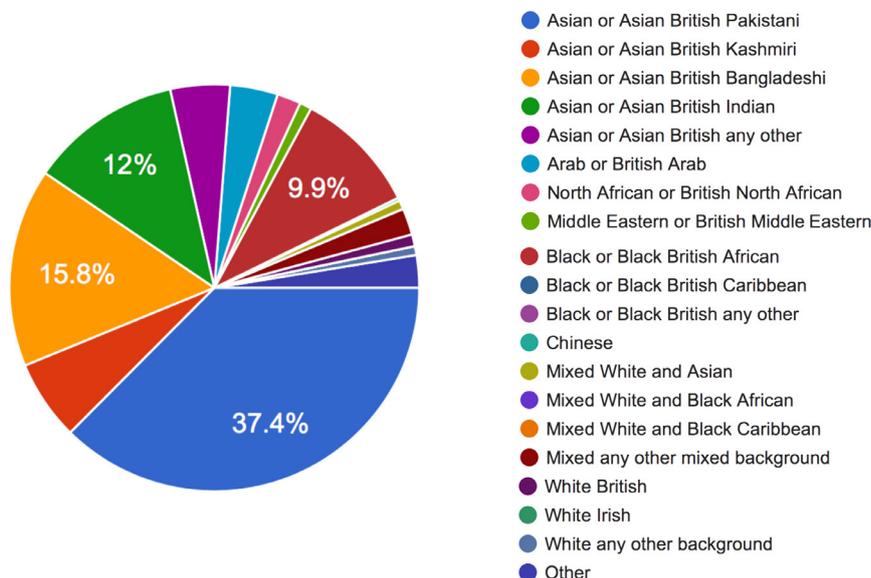


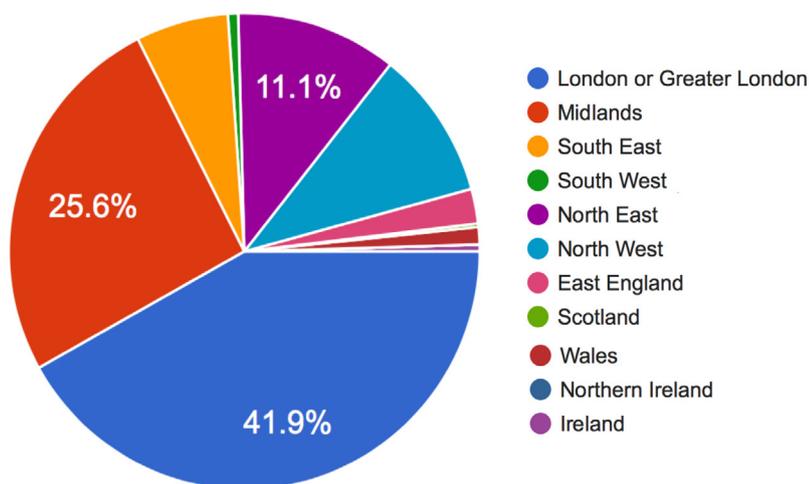
Chart 2: % of participants by ethnic identity group



As demonstrated by chart two, participants represented a diverse range of ethnicities. The largest ethnicity represented was British Pakistanis at 37.4%, followed by British Bangladeshis at 15.8%, and British Indians at 12%, which is synonymous with the settlement size of the respective communities. In descending order of participants ethnicities represented included, Black British African (9.9%), British Kashmiris (6.4%), Asian British Other (4.7%), British Arab (3.8%), Other (2.6%), British Mixed any other background (2.1%), British North African (1.9%), British Middle Eastern (0.9%), White British (0.9%), Mixed White and Asian (0.7%), Chinese (0.2%).

Approximately 42% of participants were resident of and/or located in London, 25.6% were resident of and/or located in the Midlands (Birmingham, Nottingham, Leicester, Stafford, Worcester), 11.1% were resident of and/or located in the North (including Leeds, Bradford, Scarborough, Durham, York, Sheffield), 10.1% were based in the North West (including Manchester, Cumbria, Lancaster, Liverpool), 6.4% were based in the South East (Oxford, Surrey, Portsmouth, Southampton), 2.4% were based in the East of England (Cambridge, Luton, Ipswich, Peterborough), 1.2% were based in Wales, 0.5% in Ireland, and 0.2% in Scotland.

Chart 3: % of participants by geographical location



In order to ascertain the socioeconomic backgrounds of participants, the survey also asked participants to specify their household income at the age of 14, and whether they received free school meals. Household incomes were less than £30,000 for 8.2% of participants, between £3-10,000 for 16.5% for participants, and between £10-20,000 for 22.1% of participants. In other words, nearly half of all participants' (46.8%) household incomes were below the 2018 national average household income of £28,400 (Office for National Statistics: 2019). A further 24% of participants came from households where the income was between £20,000 – 40,000. Fewer participants specified their household incomes to fall between income brackets after the £40,000 band. 5.2% of participants belonged to households where the income was £40,000-50,000, 2.4% of participants were from households where the income was £50,000-60,000, 3.5% were from households where the income was between £60,000-80,000, 0.9% were from households where the income bracket was between £80,000-100,000, and 1.4% stated their household income to be more than £100,000.

Chart 5 demonstrates that 177 of 425 (41.6%) participants received free school meals, while 248 of 425 (58.4%) participants stated not having been in receipt of free school meals. This data indicates that a significant number of British Muslim women experienced poverty when growing up, which according to sociological studies is positively correlated with lower levels of social mobility, and poorer life outcomes.

Chart 4: Participant household incomes at age 14

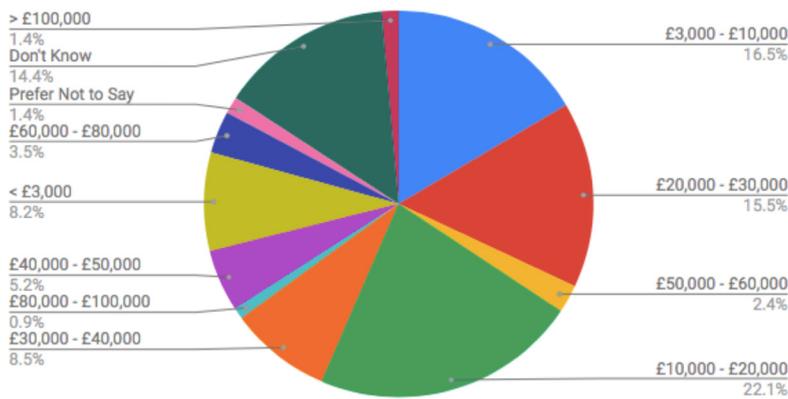
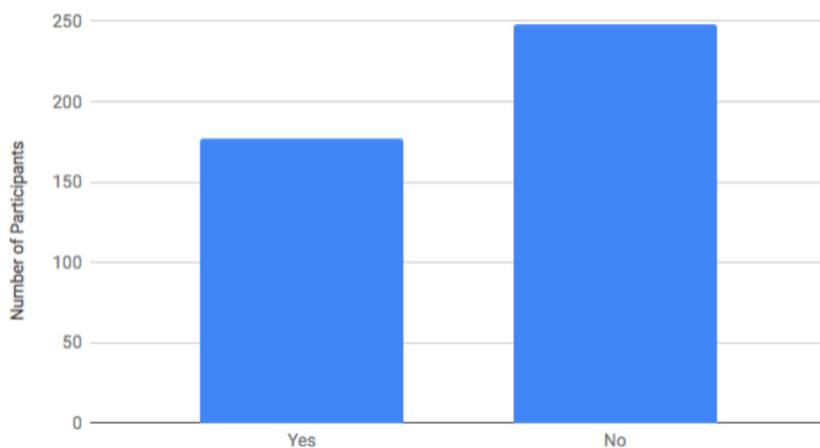
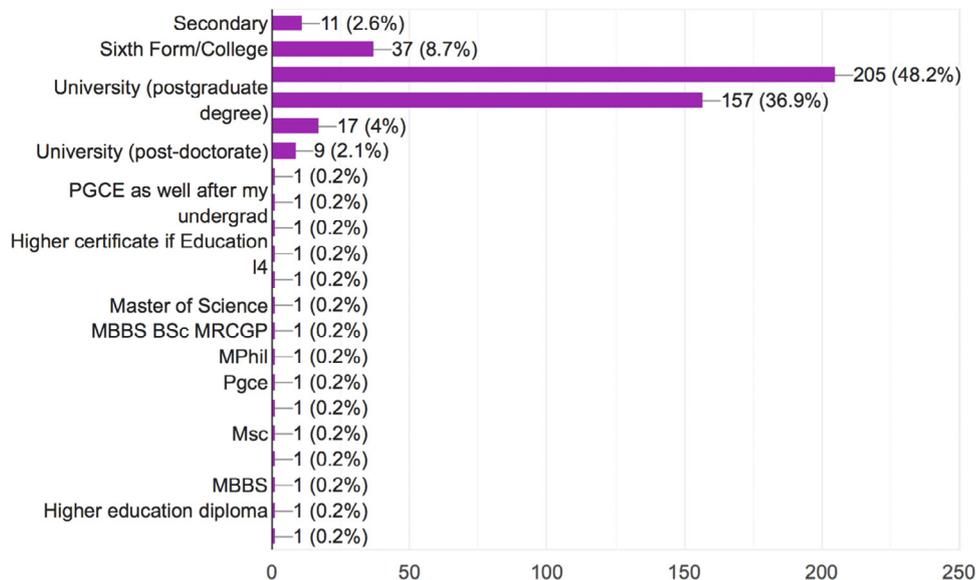


Chart 5: Number of participants in receipt of free school meals



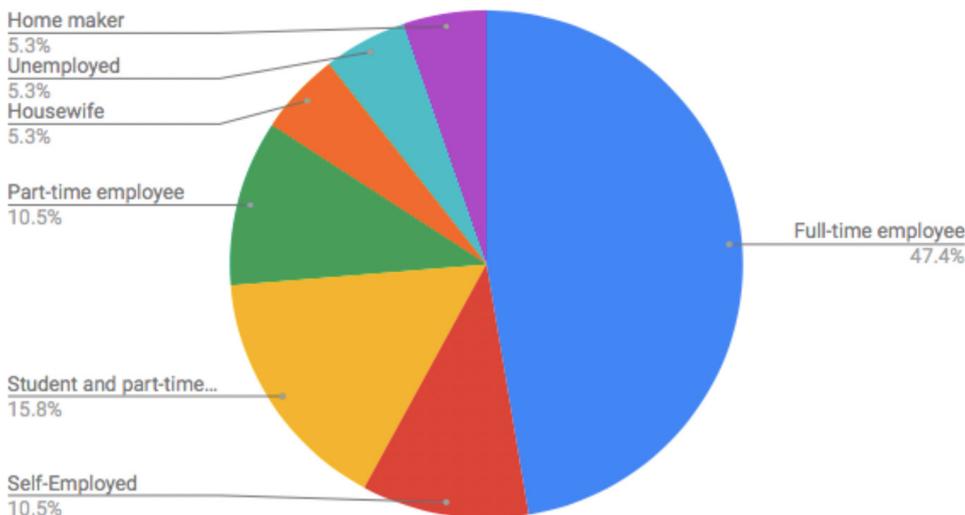
Despite almost half of participants having been raised in households below the average household income, 48.2% of participants had completed an undergraduate degree, and a further 36.9% of participants had completed a Master's degree. 4% had completed a doctorate degree and 2.1% had completed a post-doctorate education. In other words, 43% of British Muslim women had postgraduate qualifications.

Chart 6: Number of participants in receipt of free school meals



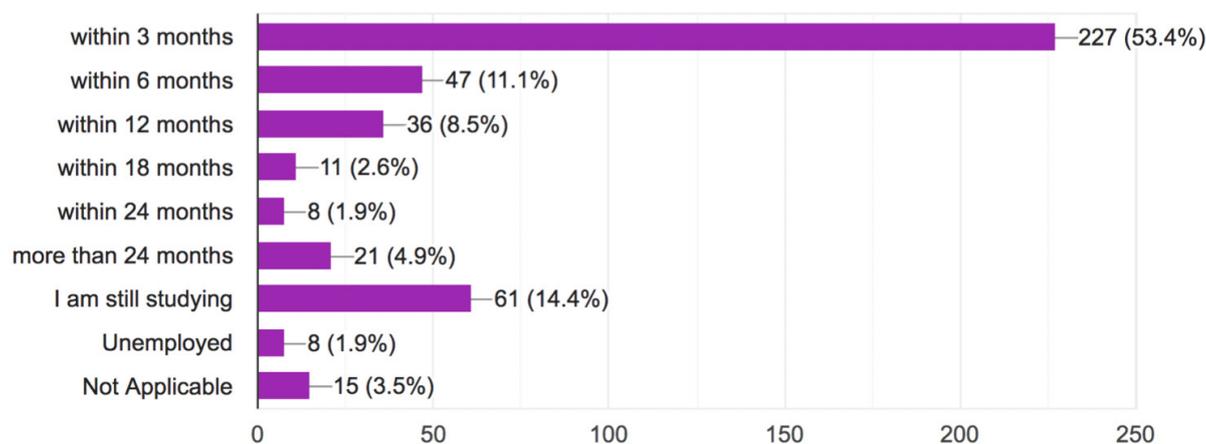
When asked to specify current employment status, 47.4% of women specified they were in full-time work, 15.8% said they were studying and working part-time, 10.5% said they were in part-time work, 10.5% were self-employed, 10.6% were housewives and/or home makers, and 5.3% were unemployed. Put differently, 84.2% of British Muslim women were actively engaged in the labour market and contributing to the economy, suggesting that Muslim women are competent and skilled.

Chart 7: Current Employment Status



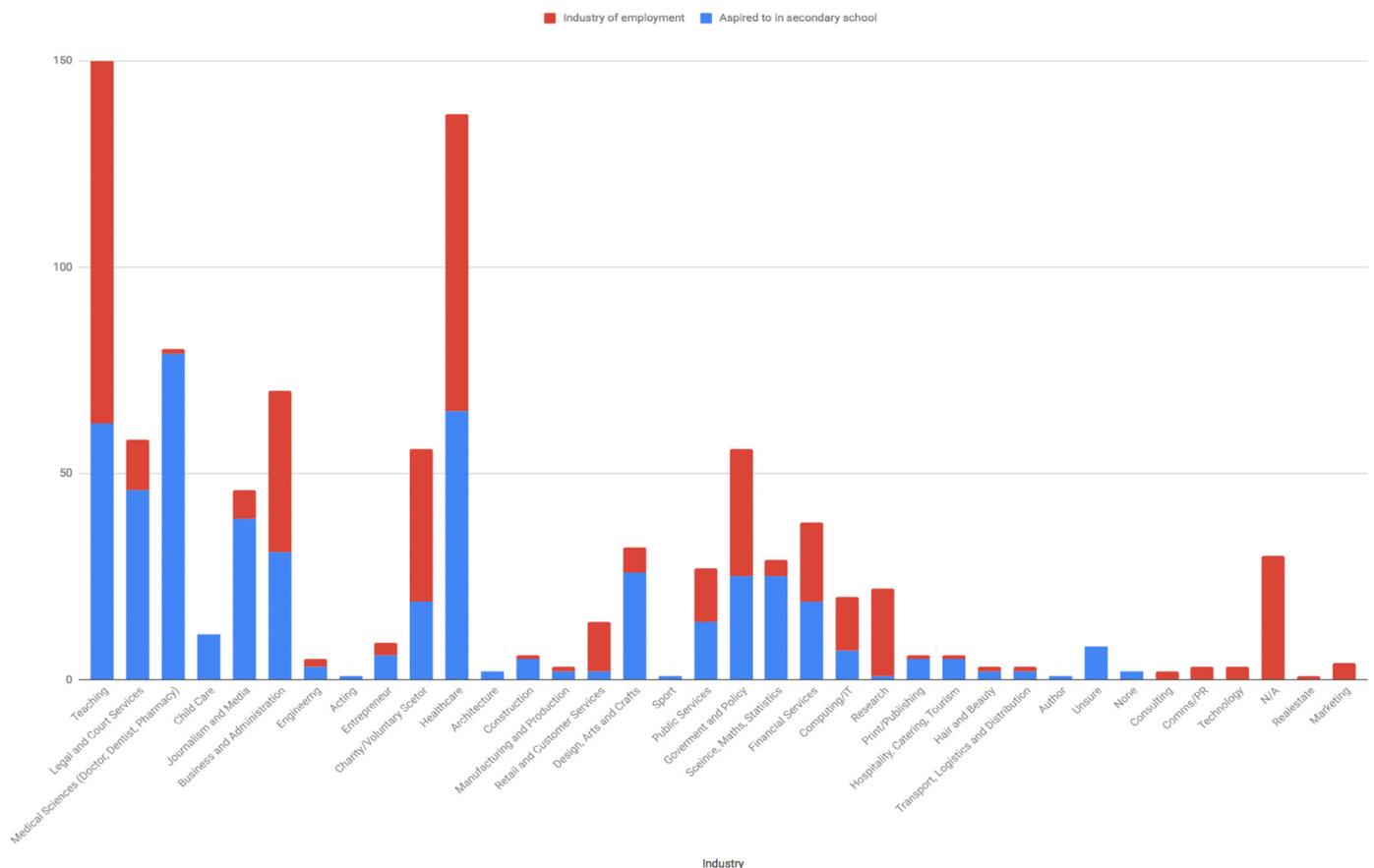
The level of competence and enthusiasm to engage in the labour market is further demonstrated by the short period within which Muslim women secured employment, following completing their formal education. More than half of participants (53.4%) found employment within three months of completing their studies. 11.1% of participants found employment within six months and 8.5% found employment within twelve months. A significant proportion of women (9.4%) however, found it difficult to secure employment, their efforts in some cases spanning more than 24 months. The issues experienced by this group of women will be explored in later sections of this report.

Chart 8: Time taken to secure employment after completing formal education



The survey also asked about the industries Muslim women currently worked, as well as the industries they aspired to join during their secondary schooling. Participants were involved in a wide range of industries with 20.5% in education and teaching, 17.9% in healthcare, 9.2% in charity and voluntary services, 8.5% in administration, business and management, 8% in government and policy, 6.6% in research, and 4.7% in financial services. When compared to the industries women aspired to enter whilst at secondary school, the results showed large discrepancies for industries such as journalism and media, medicine, and law. For instance, while 79 participants wanted to enter the medical field in secondary school, only 1 participant entered the field as a doctor. Similarly, while 46 participants wanted to become lawyers, only 12 became lawyers upon graduating university, and while 39 participants wanted to become journalists and/or enter the media profession, only seven entered the profession. Professions such as PR and Communications were not aspired to at secondary school, and only two were employed in the field. These two participants had expressed during one-to-one interviews that the PR and Communications industry was “entirely white and middle class...with significant levels of nepotism” and “a lot of exclusivity and cultural barriers associated with alcohol” were limiting factors for those who were part of the field. Similarly, while only two participants aspired to become architects in secondary school, none pursued this as a career. The results for teaching and healthcare professions (i.e. nursing), demonstrated a higher rate of subscription upon graduation than aspiration at age 14. For instance, while in secondary school 62 participants aspired to become teachers, 89 became teachers. Similarly, while 65 participants aspired to join the healthcare industry, 72 participants entered the field as full-time employees. In depth interviews with participants revealed that such professions were easier to access and enter upon graduation, and for some women these professions complemented family life (which will be discussed in a later section of the report). In sum, the evidence suggests that there is a significant discrepancy in aspired profession and actual profession, and that some industries such as medicine, law and journalism, need to facilitate greater accessibility and entrance for Muslim women through targeted schemes and mentorship.

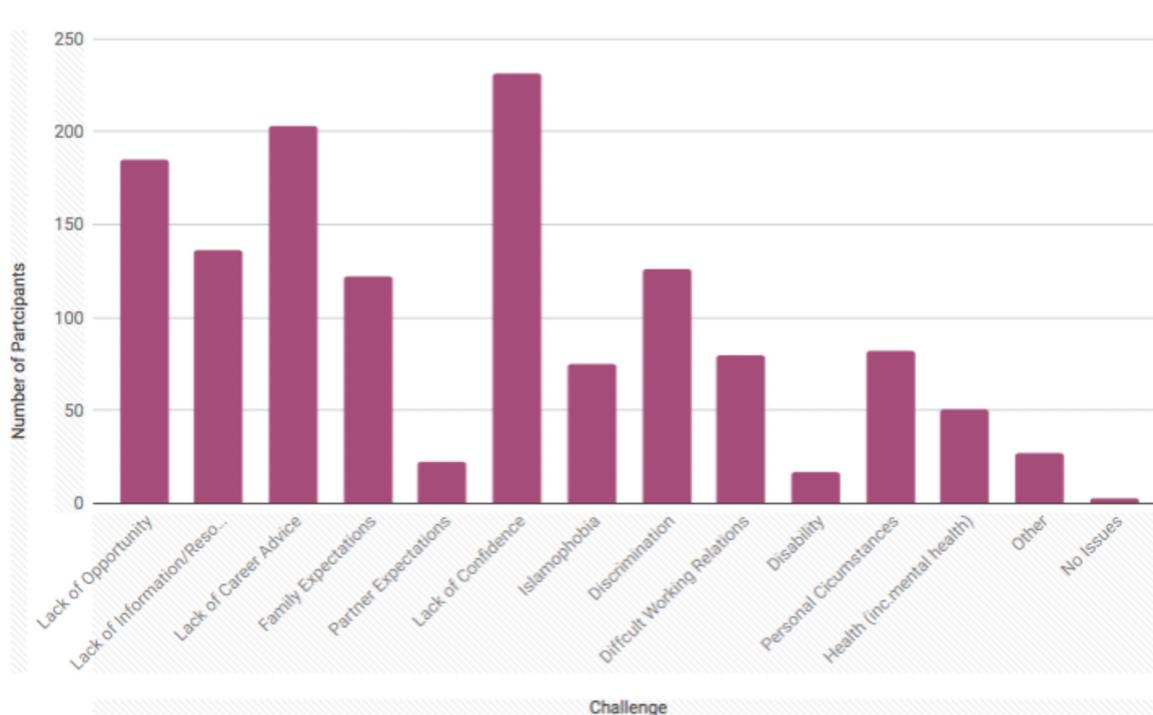
Chart 9: Ratio of aspired industry of employment to actual industry of employment



4.2 Challenges and Obstacles

The discrepancy in aspired to profession and actual profession of Muslim women raises suspicions for potential challenges and obstacles that prevent aspirations from materialising. Amongst the questions the survey comprised of, was also a question dedicated to exploring factors that hindered Muslim women's experiences of work and career development. The question presented as multiple choice with the selection of more than one option made possible. As demonstrated by chart eleven, 231 (54.3%) of participants selected lack of confidence as being a challenge. The second major challenge experienced was a lack of career advice with 203 (47.8%) of participants having made this selection. The third major factor was the lack of opportunity, with 185 (43.5%) of participants making this selection. Participants also selected lack of information resources (32%), family expectations (28.7%), partner expectations (5.2%), Islamophobia (17.6%), discrimination (29.6%), difficult working relations (18.8%), disability (4%), personal circumstances (19.3%), and health (12%), also as barriers.

Chart 10: Challenges experienced by participants



27 participants (6.25%) selected 'other' and provided further details as to the challenge(s) they experienced. Some of these included:

- "Finances"
- "Poverty"
- "Class"
- "Money"
- "Lack of networks"
- "Institutionalised racism" (x3)
- "Indecisiveness"
- "Lack of flexible working/hours" (x3)
- "Indecisiveness"
- "Childcare costs"
- "Unable to shake male's hands"
- "Not many companies welcome Islamic practice and faith"
- "Dyslexia impacting grades" (x2)
- "Motherhood"
- "Upholding obligations of faith at work"

- “Unsure of what I wanted”
- “Poor HR policies”
- “Parent economic limitations and class”
- “Not being familiar with interview skills for specific industries”
- “Lack of ambition”
- “Sexism”
- “Family friendly career”
- “Misconceptions about the workplace”
- “Whether careers are compatible with morals”

Some of the more detailed responses from participants included:

People did not believe in me. If I applied for a job, they would think I could not do it because of my age. People underestimated my ability. I feel the system is structured that way, as we have to be a certain age to be a manager, or director, but actually young people can too, more experience and greater age does not necessarily make you a better manager or director. Someone younger, with fresh eyes could do a much better job! But companies don't like that, and it creates structure. Discrimination of age is deeply embedded in every inch of our working culture, it is the basis of our social hierarchy at work.

Alcohol was part of all networking events, which was a really big challenge for me. It was so embedded within work culture that no one questioned/considered the impact for those who don't drink for religious (or even health reasons). Visibly appearing to not hold a glass or not attending these events meant that you would be easily left out and not considered for projects/promotions.

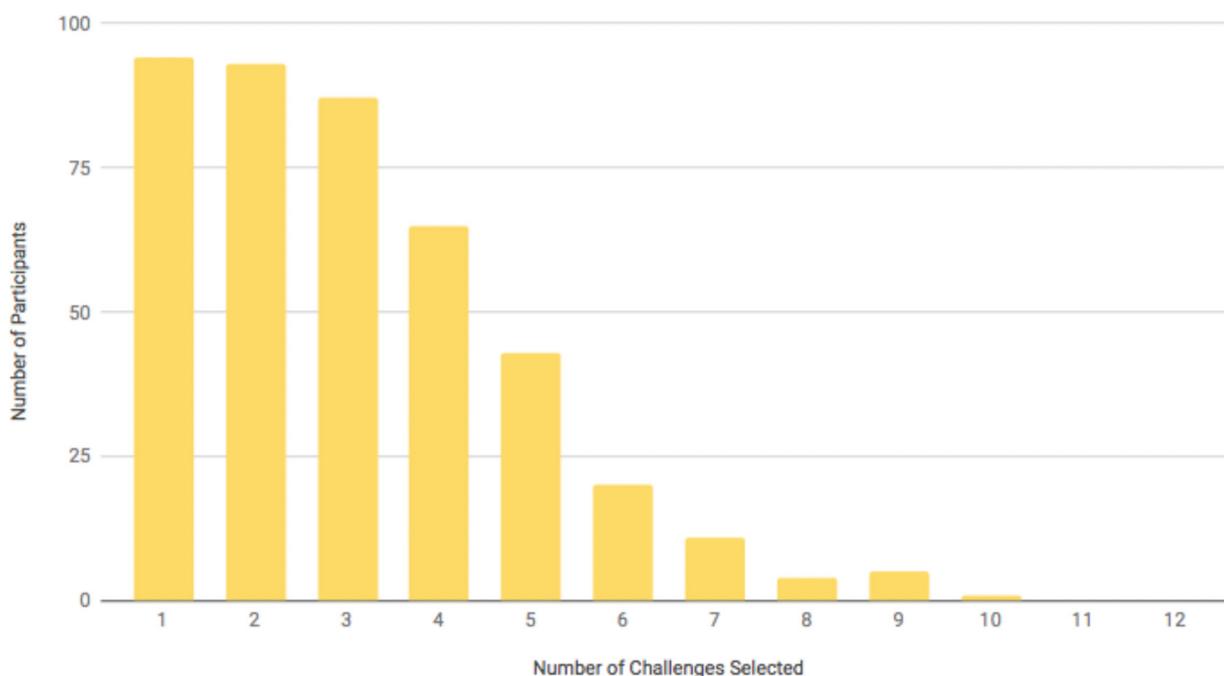
I would avoid certain opportunities myself of the fear of not being liked or perceived well for being Muslim.

Discrimination, as a child of immigrants in the 1970s my Bangladeshi parents were very ambitious for me. They encouraged me academically, I went to Cambridge, but they didn't really understand the system, how extracurricular things mattered. All of the things they thought would distract me from my studies were the things universities and employers wanted. Also, they discouraged me from journalism or anything creative because it wouldn't be secure and recognised we didn't have right contacts to succeed in those professions.

When I wanted to be a journalist, the white, male-dominated nature of the field and the fact that back then, you were expected to make your way up by networking in pubs (actual advice given at a huge careers event) totally put me off. I chose academia instead. Seeing no Muslim women hijab-wearing academics in my field (or most other fields) was daunting. But I had always been the odd one out at school and uni, so it was normal too to be in that situation. Now I look back, finances could have been a major obstacle, but I was blessed with some scholarships and had to work my way to fund graduate studies. Finances to pursue graduate studies would be a MAJOR obstacle for most people - not listed in the choices above.

Of those participants who selected from the list of options for this question, many selected multiple challenges. This is also echoed in the qualitative responses where Muslim women have stated experiencing financial, religious, and gendered barriers in their pursuit of a career in their chosen field. The chart below demonstrates the number of participants per the number of challenges selected. While 22% (94) of participants selected one challenge, the remaining 78% experienced more than one challenge, a significant finding that illustrates the sheer difficulty Muslim women experience in pursuing career and work development. This finding also goes a long way in providing a more detailed analysis of the discrepancy between aspired profession and actual profession Muslim women entered upon completing their studies. A breakdown of the number of challenges selected is as follows: 21.88% (93) of women selected two challenges, 20.5% (87) experienced three challenges, 15.3% (65) experienced four challenges, 10.11% (43) experienced five challenges, 4.7% (20) women experienced six challenges, 2.6% (11) participants experienced seven challenges, 0.94% (4) women experiences eight challenges, 1.2% (5) women experienced nine challenges, and 0.23% (1) participant experienced 10 challenges. This data suggests that there is a severe deficit in resources provided to and made available for Muslim women to enable their successful work and career development outcomes, and therefore upward social mobility. Some of the challenges selected were explored further in the semi-structured interviews with 50 Muslim women participants and will be focused on in greater detail in subsequent sections of the report.

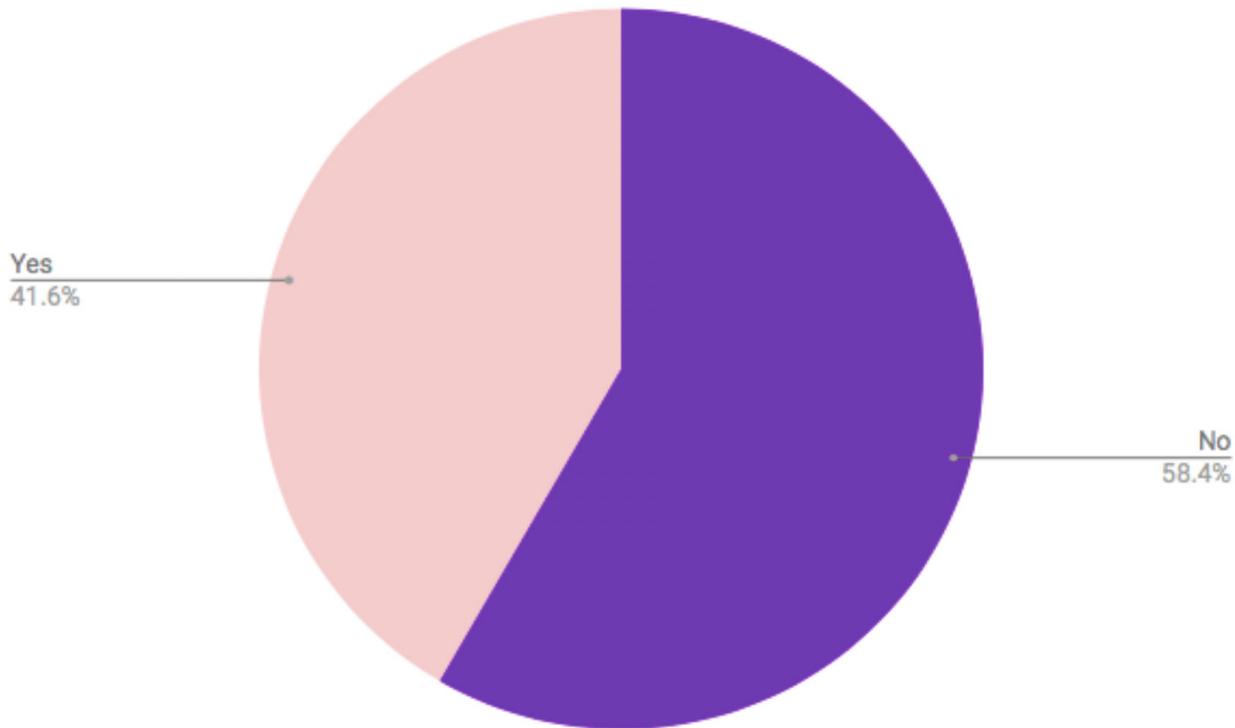
Chart 11: Number of Participants v. Number of Challenges Selected



4.2.1 Discrimination

While 47.2% of women stated they had encountered Islamophobia and discrimination as a challenge in the workplace, the survey dedicated two further questions to explore this in more detail by asking directly, whether participants had experienced any form of discrimination in the workplace. The chart below demonstrates that 41.6% of women had experienced discrimination in the workplace. Thus, the challenges experienced often as micro-aggressions, led to serious incidents of islamophobia and discrimination for 41.6% of women.

Chart 12: % of participants who experienced any form of discrimination in the workplace or work-related environment.



Participants were asked to provide further information if they answered positively to this question in both the survey and in interviews. Qualitative responses submitted as part of the survey results included being discriminated against on the grounds of gender, religion, ethnicity and class. More than often, participants were discriminated on more than one ground. For example, a participant who identified as a British Pakistani Muslim between 26-30 years of age, from London, who was working in the charity sector (but had aspired to become a journalist at school, and who came from a household income of less than £3000 per annum said:

“I once didn’t get a job because I didn’t ‘fit in with the culture.’”

I once had to hear, “If they don’t like it here, why don’t they all just go home?”

“My boss once said to me that I wasn’t made for British weather as a joke. Even though he was joking, it made me feel uncomfortable.”

“I once heard someone say that Muslims don’t do enough to call out terrorism.”

Participants shared experiences of being passed for promotion for not being ‘white enough’, ‘for being Muslim’, ‘not drinking’ or ‘hanging out and seeming sociable’, ‘for not fitting in with the culture of the company’ and experiencing ‘fear of being seen to sympathise with terrorists’, to name a few.

Islamophobia

Participants described how being Muslim was a point of contention that seeped through every aspect of working life, with one participant describing it as “it was always there, we can never escape it, they won’t let us.” From not being accommodated during Ramadan to receiving hate mail and being expected to be a spokesperson for their faith, Muslim women experienced a diverse range of micro and macroaggressions at work in this regard. Some of the responses include:

Colleagues would ridicule me when fasting, asking ‘are you still starving or whatever’. Colleagues would ask me to talk about Muslims and things she’d see in the media, as if I was the spokesperson for the entire religion. Colleagues would jokingly put alcohol glasses in my face asking if i wanted to drink it. Colleagues would get annoyed when I said I couldn’t go to the pub.

I was sacked for raising a child safeguarding concern that was made into a ‘Muslim’ issue.

I was told my designs for marketing and branding looked “too Muslim” simply because one of the animated characters had a beard. I was going for a more hipster look but apparently it was too “sunnah looking” for them...it was said or should I say shouted in front of a whole office, along with other disgusting ignorant comments.

I was treated as a representative of my race and faith (every time there was a grooming case or terrorist attack).

Interview 1 with a recruitment company - Asked why I became Muslim and when told them was told that people do stupid things at that age. Asked was I forced to wear hijab and would I take it off. Interview 2 with education charity - last question of interview- why had I become Muslim. Didn’t get either job.

Parents wanted to pull their child out of class due to me being a Muslim, even though I was graded outstanding from OFSTED for 3 years running.

Very subtle and micro-aggressive. A particular experience stands out for me when I was in a team meeting and a colleague of mine wanted to celebrate her birthday with drinks and going to a strip club. So I told her that I would join for dinner but not the drinks or strip-club since I don’t drink and I feel uncomfortable in such environments. I then had some of my colleagues turn to me and question me saying “do you not like to have fun?”. Also I had this one director of my department who became really cold towards me when she found out I’m Muslim.

Patients asked not to be treated by a Muslim doctor.

When working in an all-white workplace whenever the team socialised it would only be at gay bars or at pubs. I was the only Muslim working there, and advised due to being Muslim, I’m not able to come along, however I am more than happy to come for a meal. They never arranged a meal at a place where I can come along, which were suited to my faith. This did make me feel like I was excluded from all social events at work. Even when I was at work, their activities outside of work were always discussed openly which sometimes made me feel like I was made to be excluded because of my belief as a Muslim.

Took me 12 years to take 1 step up the ladder whereas my non BME/Muslim colleagues took 9 months to 3 years.

After terrorist attacks, whilst working as a lecturer, some students would send me anonymous hate emails, and a few would be increasingly disruptive in class to myself and students of Arab background.

Lots of racial microaggressions; making fun of mistakenly serving Muslims halal meat, being told that my grandparents journey to England was a “tell tale” I.e. a lie

Participants spoke in detail about the ways in which their dress code, particularly wearing the hijab, was a constant source of discrimination, which also coheres with the literature available of Islamophobia as a gendered act towards visibly Muslim women. Here are some of the comments participants received:

After putting a hijab on at 26 I noticed major differences in the way I was treated both in current existing work places and future job applications.

Wearing hijab places a ceiling on how far you can go... You could call it the veil ceiling like the glass ceiling...

I was dismissed / sacked for refusing to remove my headscarf (hijab).

I've been told by my hierarchy that they think I'm becoming extremist because I decided to wear hijab. I've seen my trainings and extra hours being cancelled. My files were also scrutinized.

Staff members having a problem with my hijab and cloaking this as an 'infection control' issue.

A staff member told me she wanted to burn my scarf when I was changing so I would have no choice but to come outside the changing room without one.

People assume that since I wear the hijab, my English skills would be poor.

Islamophobic comments from an impolite customer regarding the hijab telling me that she wished I wouldn't wear 'that thing' as British women had fought for the right to vote and do what they wanted and not for people 'like me' to have to wear it.

At the start of my career, as a trainee solicitor many years ago hijab was criticized both overtly and covertly. I was not invited to meetings with clients when whole rest of team went; openly challenged by a senior partner "what's that thing on your head?"; same firm I was let go despite my excellent work. Later as a junior solicitor in another firm in Wales I was not taken on to work, the reason given was client farmers would not be able to relate to me. I must say though I have also had good experiences too in Wales and Leicester.

Many non-hijab wearing participants expressed that their lack of visibility as Muslim women due to not wearing the hijab proved to be a preventative measure in their experiencing of Islamophobia. They acknowledged that had they worn the hijab, their experiences and therefore their responses to the survey and in interview, would have been very different. A number of participants also referred to their 'Muslim sounding names' as a barrier for selection at the interview stage, which resulted in participants contemplating submitting applications with 'white names'. Some participants stated that colleagues had opted to give them 'white' names, due to being easier to pronounce, which caused participants to feel deprived of their personhood, identity, and agency.

Sexism

In addition to the 'otherised' positions held by Muslim women in the workplace, participants also highlighted sexism in the workplace as a significant factor that hindered their career developments. Participants cited experiences of being seen as less competent than their male counterparts, pregnancy and motherhood as significant barriers.

Being a young Asian woman, was told how I should dress even though I was not breaking the establishment's dress code, was told to 'tone down' red lipstick and red nails etc.

My boss subjected me to discrimination. As a man and he would always put me down. Didn't like the fact that as a woman I was getting more publicity than him. He made my life hell, and I had to leave my job as a manager that I really enjoyed. I got fed up of men telling me what I should and should not do. This knocked my confidence so bad it took me 2 years to get back on my feet by my setting up my own organisation, and I'm so proud of my achievement. Now no one can put me down.

Not being taken seriously as my male colleagues.

Indirect sexism - working in a male dominated environment it is difficult to be taken seriously. In addition to this in an environment where the males know each and have prior links can be difficult. Also, being branded as bossy or challenging as opposed to hard working and passionate as the male counterparts would be.

I told the manager I didn't feel comfortable with him touching me in a specific way to which he started saying horrible things about how I shouldn't be in this industry if I can't handle anything like that, and that they've bent their backs for by not letting me serve alcohol, along with other things he said because he was offended.

People saw me as the pretty nice girl, so didn't take me as seriously... whereas other more stern individuals got further ahead.

In organisations where the workforce was mostly Muslim, senior colleagues were always older Arab or Asian men in their late forties, early fifties. There was explicitly discrimination against women and my female colleagues and I were rarely taken seriously. We were rarely given the opportunity to provide real input in our projects and were often left out of decision-making processes despite being very qualified and experienced in our fields. Sexism and sexist jokes were explicit.

Patients assume that since I am a female that I am a nurse rather than a doctor.

I was also told that having decided to prioritise looking after my children when they were young, I could not now expect to have a career and should be grateful to have been given a job in a school (I have a doctorate from Cambridge University).

My white male colleague was paid 20K more than me because a white male face was better for business.

Being a new mum meant that I'd be overlooked for certain projects and assignments.

A number of postgraduate students shared experiences of sexism from academics and/ students. During an interview, a participant who identified as British Arab between 21-26 years of age, and who was from the South East of England told me about her experience during her first year PhD viva when a male academic who was part of her panel "was intimidating and told me that there was no point to my research...it wasn't going to go anywhere...". Similarly, another participant of British Pakistani heritage between the ages of 25-30 who was from the North of England experienced sexism from her PhD supervisor who "felt as a woman she was too emotional to be an academic." Another participant who was between the ages of 25-30, identified as British Kashmiri and was from the Midlands spoke about an encounter she had with a white male researcher who had not been awarded a PhD but in error, his university had listed him as a 'Dr', which he made no effort to correct. "If I as a woman had not been awarded a PhD and someone in error had stated that on the university website, there would be an outcry...I would be called a fraud, but as a man he got away with that."

Sexism was particularly prominent amongst women in the political sphere. Three participants shared that they had been blocked from standing in local elections for the Labour Party expressing that there was a concerted effort by fellow South Asian men who were upholding patriarchal and cultural values in their roles as gatekeepers within local politics. An excerpt from an interview with a participant provides further nuance:

“There is a lot of biraaderi politics and nepotism involved in local politics which brings shame to the Labour party. I tried to stand and was blocked by local councilors and even the MPs who felt if they supported me, they would lose votes because these councilors were gatekeepers for huge blocks of votes they could sway in whatever way they directed...it was a really sad situation...I tried to contact the Labour NEC and senior members of the Labour party but there was silence from everyone...they also kept changing the goal posts as to why I did not qualify for selection, from saying that I was not a member long enough (which was a lie), to saying that I hadn't campaigned enough (also a lie). I felt I had so much to offer, but no one cared about that, which led to me really lose faith in my ability to bring about positive social change to society at grassroots level.”

Socioeconomic Background

Socioeconomic background was a significant barrier that Muslim women faced and was often discussed and referred to as social class, poverty, money issues, lack of funding amongst others. Many participants shared stories about having to find part-time work at the age of sixteen whilst studying for their A-Levels (or equivalent) to make ends meet, as their parents/carers were not able to fund basic amenities such as their bus passes, lunch and snacks, and clothing (an issue, as uniforms are not worn in FE colleges). Some participants also spoke about not having the financial resources to fund extra-curricular activities such as music lessons and additional tuition to aid their academic development, which would go on to ensure they would secure places at top universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. One participant shared her experience of applying to Oxford:

“As the eldest child I was never really prioritised by my parents and they did not have high hopes/ambitions for me...the expectation was to marry someone and settle down. However, when it came to applying to university, while preparing to submit my application off on the UCAS system, I came across the Oxford alternative prospectus in my careers office. I was flicking through it and came across a peculiar sounding subject which caught my attention. I read through it and decided it was SO me! I decided to amend my application and personal statement and submitted my application. My careers advisor told me that I would get five rejections from UCAS, but I was offered an interview at Oxford...when I asked for help [from the teachers] to prepare for my Oxford interview, they told me that they were not paid enough to help me outside of class hours. So I took two weeks off college and sat in the central library in the city centre and prepared from 8am – 7pm. It paid off in the end, as I was offered a place. But because I was from a low-income background, I felt my teachers didn't have high hopes for me. But that didn't matter to me, because I had high hopes and lofty aspirations for myself...later there were also issues with my family about taking up my place at Oxford because it wasn't the done thing for girls to leave the house before getting married, but I stood my ground and went anyway. I didn't know much back then, but I knew that it was too big of an opportunity to miss. Even though everyone frowned upon my choices then, now my family and the community refer to me 'as the girl who went to Oxford, where Imran Khan (Pakistan's Prime Minister), also studied, as it's the only reference point the community know about.”

This participant also mentioned that she had to work two part-time jobs to fund her college education, as her parents were unable to afford to pay for her any longer. However, she stated that:

“Oxford had gone over and above their ability to accommodate me, from understanding that I needed an ensuite room to prevent sharing with male students and therefore satisfy my parents, and also mute community rumours about my ‘promiscuity’. I was also offered an Oxford Opportunity Bursary and other financial awards that helped me to focus on my studies and not worry about finances...since graduating I have not encountered or experienced this level of support and I realise how extraordinary it is, and I have attended three other institutions for postgraduate study where this level of support is severely lacking and/or entirely lacking.”

A second participant who was studying for her PhD, who also identified between the age of 25-30, and was from London, shared that when she applied for financial aid from her university to help her fund an opportunity to study abroad, her University had told her not to take up opportunities if she could not afford them. In her response to the university, she wrote:

“If a Black person who had experienced racism all their life wanted to take up an opportunity that was seldom offered to Black people, would the university tell that person not to take up the opportunity because racism is rife? So why would a Russell Group University that has the power and resources to alleviate my situation tell a BME Muslim woman from the poorest constituency in the UK that she should not take up such an opportunity? This is discrimination on the grounds of socioeconomic background.”

While the university had not responded positively to the participant’s complaint, she was determined to take the matter further. She expressed that after she began her PhD, her university had acknowledged that BME groups were underrepresented in postgraduate research degrees and as a result, had made available specific scholarships to attract BME students to study doctorate degrees. As a result, this participant felt that her university was “superficially and disingenuously outwardly promoting diversity all the while internally were complicit in discriminatory institutional policies and practices.” This was also true of workplace experiences where Muslim women felt that companies were “paying lip service to diversity and inclusion policies” and in practice, did very little to make work and career development for Muslim women accessible and achievable.

Discrimination within the Muslim Community

There was also a great deal of discussion during one-to-one interviews that highlighted discrimination within the Muslim community, which impacted women’s confidence levels. This included being discriminated for having darker skin, being of ‘lower caste’ (particularly expressed by South Asian Muslim women), for being ‘Mirpuri’ (from a region within Kashmir looked down on by some within the Pakistani community), and coming from a socially unaccepted background (such as divorced parents and/or incarcerated family members), amongst others. Such factors led to women feeling they were not good enough, which then translated and transpired in other aspects of their lives – such as experiences of work and career development – and vice versa.

4.2.2 Family and Partner Expectations

33.9% of participants stated that family and partner expectations were barriers to their career development. For some participants whose families were supportive of their pursuit of education and career development, they shared that from an early age their families wished for them to enter medical, legal or teaching professions, as these professions were 'acceptable' amongst their kin and community ties, and would bring them honour and social status. For example, one participant stated "when my family heard that I was doing music at university, they couldn't understand why I would pick that subject. The most they always saw my music activities as was 'extracurricular' and not something I could make a career from." Another participant shared that when she told her father that she wanted to pursue a career in politics, her father told her:

"If you were a son I would help and give flyers out and help you by asking people to vote but you are a daughter so I will not be...if you still really want to stand in an election, stand in another city, not here where everyone knows us..."

For this particular participant, cultural norms and family views about 'how far women can go' and in which spaces they can perform and contribute, were proving to be limiting factors. The participant, a British Pakistani between the ages of 21-25 told me that she ignored her father's comment and that she was going to "pursue a political career regardless of her father's views."

A number of participants, discussed at length during the interviews about their duties towards their family members, which involved a great deal of emotional work.

"I've always translated for my mom, wrote all the letters, called all the relevant organisations such as the bank and the council, and for her hospital and doctors appointments. I also take her to the hospital and make sure she understands everything the doctors and nurses are saying... its hard work because I also had to do this alongside school, college and university, and even now alongside work. It's more difficult to take time off work now, so sometimes I call in sick when no one else is available so that I can take my mum to the hospital."

As well as performing in their roles as daughters, participants also carried out considerable duties as sisters, often guiding their younger siblings in their career choices and educational trajectories, providing additional tutoring, tracking their academic achievements, attending parents' evenings and in some cases disciplinary meetings when younger siblings misbehaved, arranging their work experience, ensuring they attended medical checkups and appointments etc. In many cases, Muslim women were managing their siblings' professional and personal developments, as well as carrying out considerable levels of housework, kin work, and emotional work for their parents and extended family members.

Participants expressed that lack of flexible working hours and/or ability to work from home, child care costs, and the lack of suitability of their chosen professions led to incompatibility with marriage and motherhood. For those participants who had not yet married, their experiences of dating had involved navigating through prospective spouses who wanted them to be stay at home wives after marriage. A British Mauritian Muslim woman between 25-30 years old from the greater London area said:

"Even if men were doctors and highly educated themselves, they still wanted stay at home wives."

One participant who was between 25-30 years old, of Pakistani heritage, and had studied to postgraduate level, shared her experience of receiving a document from a prospective spousal candidate, in which he detailed his expectations of marriage. Upon receiving and reading the document she “immediately withdrew from pursuing a future with him.” She shared the document with the principal researcher during the interview, and consented for this to be published as part of the research. The full document reads as follows:

Things I would like from married life:

- *I would want someone who is fiercely loyal to me and part of their interest is to support me and help me most importantly in my Deen in whatever way that takes shape. I would also like to help that person get to Allah and in what they want to do as long as it does not overlap upon something I do not wish to be part of my life.*
- *I would not want my wife to have a public facing job, like being on TV or some sort of famous person in that way. I would not mind if my wife was known in the capacity of teacher or academic. I would not want my wife to be in politics because of the nature of the job and the way in which politicians are looked down upon and at the mercy of people.*
- *I would not want to be in a marriage that is driven by pursuits of duniya, unnecessary expenses and things, rather I would want my life to full of substance and experiences. I would not mind paying for fulfilling things which are educational or spiritual or for enjoyment, however I would not want to spend excessive money on cars houses and items of clothing only what is needed to look good, presentable and live comfortably. I would also not like to be in a marriage in which I felt I had to work hard just to meet the excessive wants of my family. I would thus like for my wife to not prioritise these things, and be content with simplicity and enough that is comfortable and not be demanding.*
- *I would work straight after leaving [REDACTED] full time either as a teacher or in some other capacity. I would then like to engage in some part time studies which were in relation to my Islamic studies, I would then eventually want to open my own school however this would be a long term project, something that I would envisage embarking upon when I was around 40. As part of part time studies I may also want to embark on a part-time PHD at some point however this would be subject to how possible this was with regard to my life.*
- *I would like my wife to stay home after she gives birth for at least 2 years, as I believe in this period the child needs the mother more than anything. I would also like maybe 3 children but this is of course just an idea. After this I would not mind if my wife returns to work however I feel this would perhaps be best if it was part time until the children get older, I would also like to engage in a process of home schooling with my children especially when they are young. This would also be more a responsibility for my wife however if I had started my own school, or had the ball rolling by this stage then I could use this to home school my own children.*
- *I would also want the final decisions in life to be down to me, even though there would always be discussion I would want the final say on the major decisions in life.*
- *I would also want my wife to be someone who makes an effort for me in terms of how she presented herself.*

- I would also want my wife to be responsible for cooking, I would wash dishes and at times help, I would also not mind cooking once a month or something but not often. I would also want for at least half the week food to be made in a fresh way which means not using frozen foods.
- I would also want my wife to consider our wider family important, including hers depending on if they are good. It would be good to have a community raising a child rather than just a husband, wife partnership.
- I would ensure that my wife and children were safe and secure and enabled to progress in their journey to Allah and also in their journeys in life. I would do everything in my power to ensure financial stability such that we are comfortable and can do what we want to do in terms of experiences however there is likely to be some restrictions but I do not feel this is a big issue and is actually quite natural.
- I would always treat my family with complete love and devotion.
- If my wife was aligned to these values and ideas then I would do everything in my power to have a good lifestyle in this regard.
- I have thought about what I want from life over the last few months, over my life thus far and where I wish to go in the future. I have realised that I am a simple person who just wants a simple life where I am trying to do good. I don't want leadership positions unless it is thrust upon me, at every respect I will not try to take it upon myself. Rather I want to work on myself and my sphere of influence which is my family, friends and community. I am also a very principled person who has certain views about my life and how I want it to be and I know that whatever happens I will always default to these positions and ideas because whenever I move away from these positions then I go astray and my life is not as productive anymore. In addition to this I feel I would want my life partner to fully subscribe to these ideas, if she did not then I do not believe this would lead to a happily married life."

This document was incredibly alarming not least because Islamic and cultural values were being amalgamated, but also because the rights of a wife and/or woman in Islam were dangerously being misconstrued. In fact, Islam requires the husband to provide for the wife beyond monetary terms to include a nanny and a cook, thus rendering the content of the above letter Islamically unfounded. It also demonstrates that educated and driven Muslim women are being compelled to make by their prospective spouses and/or partners, indicating that this could be a broader demographic issue that may need further investigation.

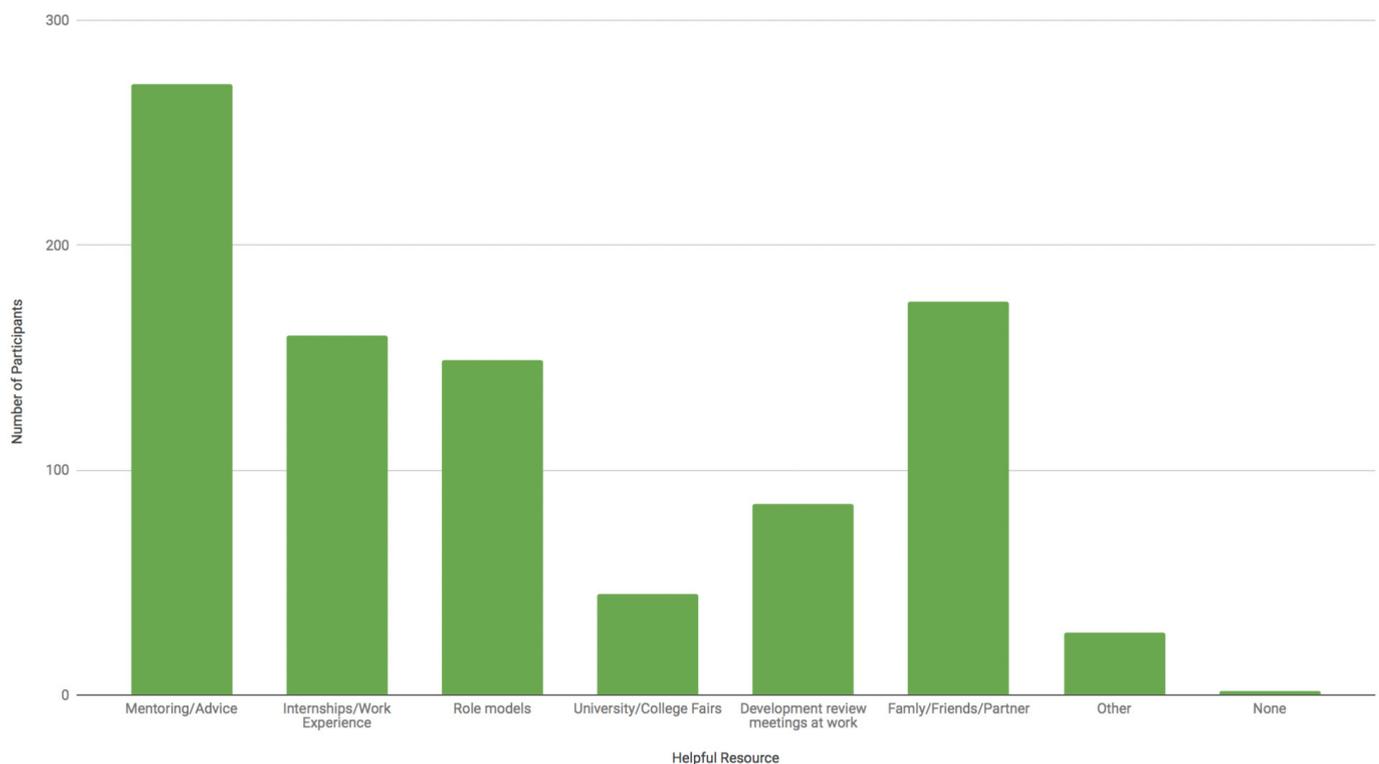
Many participants shared that there was a deficit in the quality of Muslim men who would be supportive of their career aims aspirations and as a result, they felt that at some point in their careers they would have to make sacrifices in order to experience marriage and family life, which they felt were also integral to their agency. While not all, but some participants had actively made choices in the past and others were currently making choices that would facilitate a healthy work life balance, and the accommodation of family and married life. Both the quantitative and qualitative results of this research demonstrate that in order for Muslim women to have successful careers, their families and partners (including prospective partners) must be supportive, which may require developmental strategies to develop a tolerance and a desire for what are currently referred to negatively as 'career women', amongst British Muslim men. Efforts to shift the discourse around 'career women' within the Muslim community, are required now more than ever before.



5. Looking Towards the Future

Given the significant number of challenges that Muslim women experienced, it is vital to also enquire as to the ways in which these challenges can be mitigated in order for Muslim women to be able to achieve their maximum potential. Further, given the severe gap in aspired profession and attained professions, and the loss of talent that is intricately linked with this, it is paramount that strategies are devised to cater for the needs of Muslim women in work and career development. The graph below demonstrates participant responses as to the resources that were most helpful to them during their work and career development thus far. Participants were able to select more than one option if applicable.

Chart 13: The most helpful resources for Muslim women's work and career development.



64% (272) participants stated they had benefited from mentoring and advice, 41% (175) participants stated they had found it useful to speak with and receive guidance from family, friends and partners, 37.6% (160) participants stated internships and work experience were crucial for their work and career development, 35% (149) participants stated role models as being a positive source for work and career development, 20% (85) participants stated having found development review meetings helpful, 10.5% (45) participants benefited from university and college careers fairs, 6.6% (28) participants selected 'other', and 0.5% (2) selected none of the above.

The data demonstrates that helpful advice from mentors is the most useful resource. However, during interviews participants mentioned that it was difficult to acquire mentors in relevant fields of interest and often, it took a number of spontaneous requests to successfully receive advice from mentors. This is a particularly potent finding as it can in many ways account for the gap in aspired to profession at age 14 and attained profession upon graduation, as mentorship organisations such as MOSAIC cater for pupils aged between 11-16, which leaves those aged 16+ without guidance and advice. By extension then, this data can be viewed as an indicator as to an unmet need for a formal mentoring organisation and/or service to be made available to Muslim women across the country.

Participants who selected 'other' provided further details as to the form of helpful resources which included funding, scholarships and sponsorship, networking, self-motivation and determination. Given that nearly half of all participants' (46.8%) household incomes were below the 2018 national average household income of £28,400 (Office for National Statistics: 2019), lack of financial resources is a structural issue that remains present and holds deterministic powers over the work and career trajectories of Muslim women.

A PhD student in her mid-20s who came from one of the poorest constituencies in the UK, told me:

"I did not have funding to pursue my PhD but I was determined to do so and so I applied to thousands of organisations during my studies for funds. I would pitch my research, myself, my skills, attach copies of my CV, copies of sample chapters, but I would not receive responses... thankfully the responses I did receive provided me scholarships and I managed to get through my studies...I just wish people saw the value of my research and my abilities as a scholar to properly invest in me...I wish that I didn't have to go through such a difficult time funding wise throughout my studies...it was a huge source of mental distress for me..."

A 29-year-old Muslim woman of Bangladeshi heritage who worked as a parliamentary staffer told me:

"Some of the opportunities available are immense, but often they do not pay enough for you to get by in central London. It would be helpful if there was a fund made available for people like me to take advantage of opportunities, rather than turning them down due to financial reasons..."

For Muslim women to succeed then, socioeconomic factors such as financial resources ought to be made available.

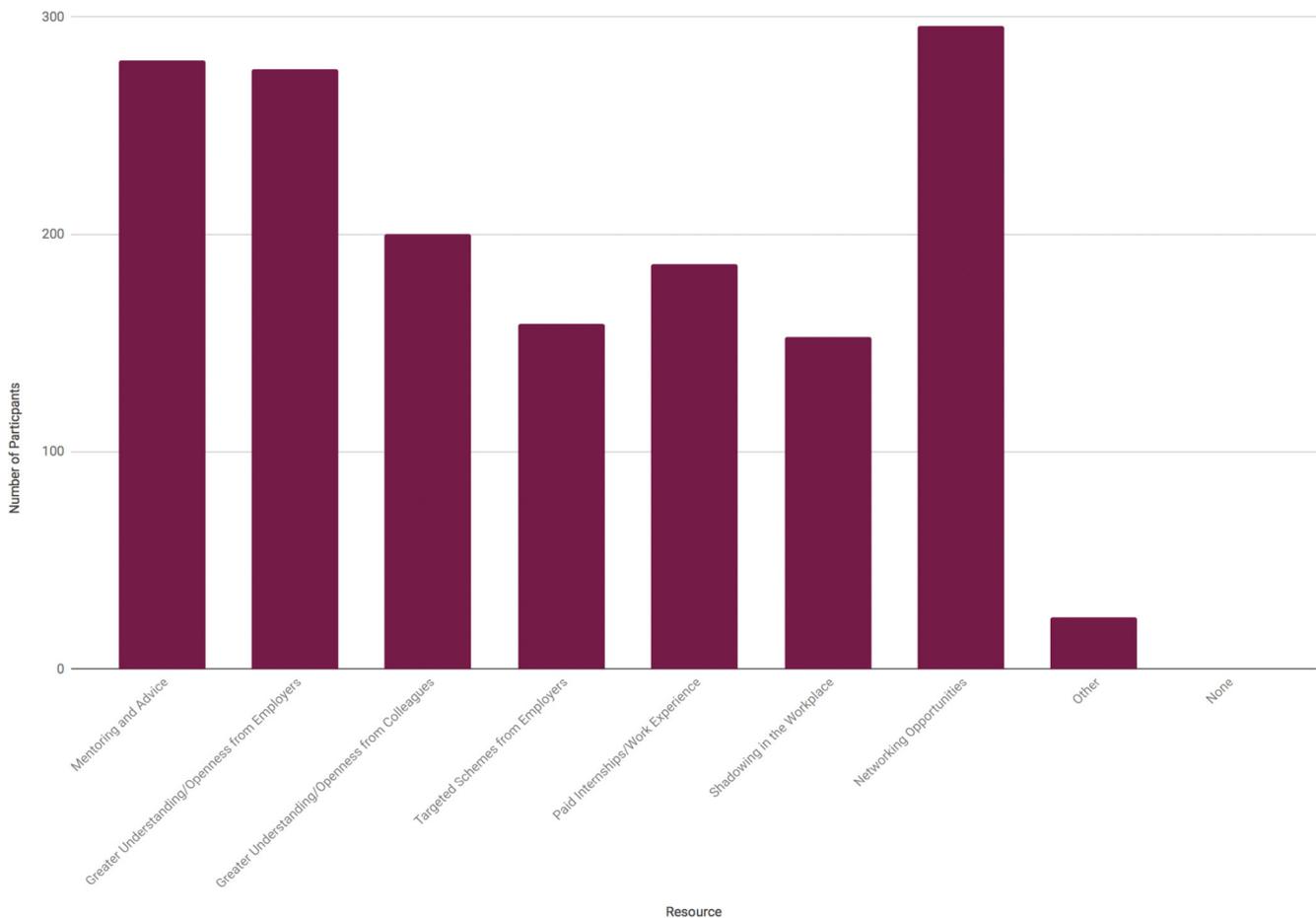
Participants also selected networks as a form of helpful resource under the 'other' category, which was teased out further during the in-depth semi-structured interviews. Many participants stated their workplaces had 'tight-knit networks, were places of 'exclusivity', and that 'old boys' networks' were a significant force deterring their progress. This is further demonstrated by the data, as only 0.5% (2) of participants stated networks as being helpful in their work and career development, while in interviews 36 out of 50 women stated networks as a resource they required in order to progress. Mentoring and networking schemes currently offered by Mosaic, Operation Black Vote, and Muslim Women Connect, if developed further and tailored to Muslim women as per the findings of this report, would be highly beneficial.

The survey also included a question about how to improve the work and career development experiences of Muslim women in their current and future endeavours. Chart 15 below echoes the discussion outlined in the report thus far, as networking, mentoring, career advice, and greater understanding from employers were the three most selected responses. A detailed breakdown of the results is as follows: 66% (280) participants selected mentoring and advice, 65% (276) participants selected greater understanding/openness from employers, 47% (200) participants selected greater understanding/openness from colleagues, 27% (159) selected targeted schemes from employers, 43% (186) participants selected paid internships/work experience, 44% (153) participants selected shadowing in the workplace, 70% (296) participants selected networking opportunities, and 5% (24) participants selected 'other'. Those who selected other provided further detail. Some of the responses in this category included:

- Positive discrimination
- Designated persons at workplaces to report incidents of discrimination
- Training on biases to prevent awkwardness and limiting perceptions/stereotypes
- Cultural/religious sensitivity training to not offend
- Level playing field of genuine equality of opportunity
- Confidence building workshops
- Flexible working
- Alcohol free socials/networking events
- Respecting our beliefs and values
- Community support as we're often told to go into jobs like teaching
- Large organisation such as the NHS should discuss these issues with managers so they can implement positive change within and amongst their teams
- Reassess workforce promotional structures to ensure the makeup is reflective of the communities they serve
- Skills to network effectively

Responses such as confidence building workshops and alcohol-free networking and social events also echo results in the previous chapter, wherein participants stated lack of confidence and a dominating presence of an alcohol culture in the workplace, as significant challenges to their work and career development. If such resources together with mentoring and advice, paid internships and work experience, targeted schemes from employers, and a commitment for inclusion and diversity that actually materialises and translates into positive experiences, British Muslim women's experiences of work and career development can soar. While resilience is high amongst British Muslim women, until these basic building blocks are instilled, British Muslim women will continue to experience hardship.

Chart 14: Resources that would be helpful for Muslim Women in their current and future experiences of work and career development.



5.1. Muslim Women’s Skills Workshops at SOAS, University of London

Central to the Principal Researcher’s ethos is the notion that research must drive social change, which is integral to what the researcher terms her ‘personal feminism’ (Bi: 2019a, 75). With this in mind, the principal researcher employed the research findings in the designing of a twelve-week “Muslim Women’s Skills Workshop” Series at The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. The workshop series takes place every fortnight and is free of charge and open to the public. Over the course of twelve sessions, skills such as confidence, speed networking, public speaking, time management, and conflict resolution are developed. Each workshop also comprises of a narrative element, where Muslim women are encouraged to consider the power of narratives such as personal experiences, self-care, resilience, self-awareness, and relationships, and to share these with one another.

Also integrated into the series are panel events that focus on a particular industry and/or profession. For these, Muslim women within the respected fields of focus are invited to offer personal insights into their career trajectories. These panel events are designed to demonstrate the presence of Muslim women in a diverse range of professions and industries, thereby inspiring participants that they too, can succeed and thrive in such industries and professions.

The rational underpinning of this approach is grounded in the research findings, which suggest that Muslim Women’s empowerment is inclusive of both the personal and professional levels, which are inseparable. In other words, in order to empower women in the workplace, it is paramount for personal development and empowerment to also occur.

These workshops are the first of their kind to be offered at any UK university. Since Muslim women expressed extremely low levels of confidence, and there is strong evidence to suggest that talent is being lost between the ages of 14-22, universities can take a leading role in addressing the needs of Muslim women to ensure that they reach their full potential. As a result, plans are underway to not only make these workshops an annual occurrence in London, but also to deliver these workshops at universities in other parts of the UK, such as Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds. This will ensure that valuable resources are not concentrated in the UK's capital city, which could lead to further entrenching the 'North/South divide', often visible in social and economic outcomes.

The poster detailing the workshop series and selected images from the workshops delivered so far, can be found below:

SOAS
University of London

The Movement
Creating a Safe Space for Muslim Women

SOAS FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

MUSLIM WOMEN'S SKILLS WORKSHOPS

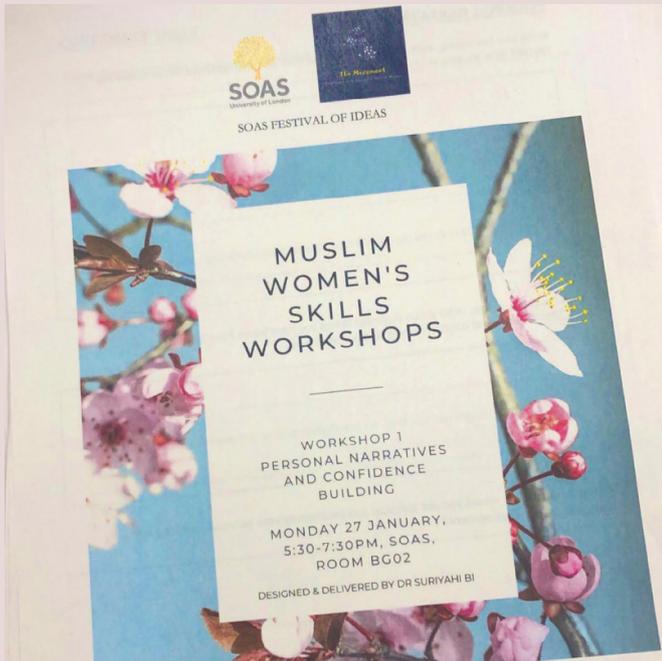
1. Monday 27th January, 5:30-7:30pm: Personal narratives and confidence.
2. Monday 10th February 5:30-7:30pm: Resilience narratives and 'perfecting your elevator pitch'.
3. Monday 24th February, 5:30-7:30pm: Self-awareness narratives and speed networking.
4. Monday 9th March, 5:30-7:30pm: "Navigating Academia as a Muslim Woman"
(Panel discussion followed by Q&A).
5. Monday 23rd March, 5:30-7:30pm: Interfaith narratives, and calming anxiety.
6. Monday 6th April, 5:30-7:30pm: 'Patience and prayer' narratives, and public speaking.
7. Monday 20th April, 5:30-7:30pm: "Navigating Politics as a Muslim Woman"
(Panel discussion followed by Q&A).
8. Monday 4th May, 5:30-7:30pm: Relationship narratives, and time management workshop.
9. Monday 18th May, 5:30-7:30pm: "Navigating the Legal Profession as a Muslim Woman"
(Panel discussion followed by Q&A).
10. Monday 1st June, 5:30-7:30pm: Self-care narratives and conflict resolution.
11. Monday 15th June, 5:30-7:30pm: "Navigating Media and Journalism as a Muslim Woman".
(Panel discussion followed by Q&A).
- 12: Monday 29th June, 5:30-7:30pm: Gratitude narratives and 'what does leadership mean to us'.

DESIGNED & DELIVERED BY DR SURIYAH BI
CONTACT: SB210@SOAS.AC.UK

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WWW.MUSLIMWOMENSSKILLSWORKSHOPS.EVENTBRITE.CO.UK

Poster for the workshop series at SOAS, University of London

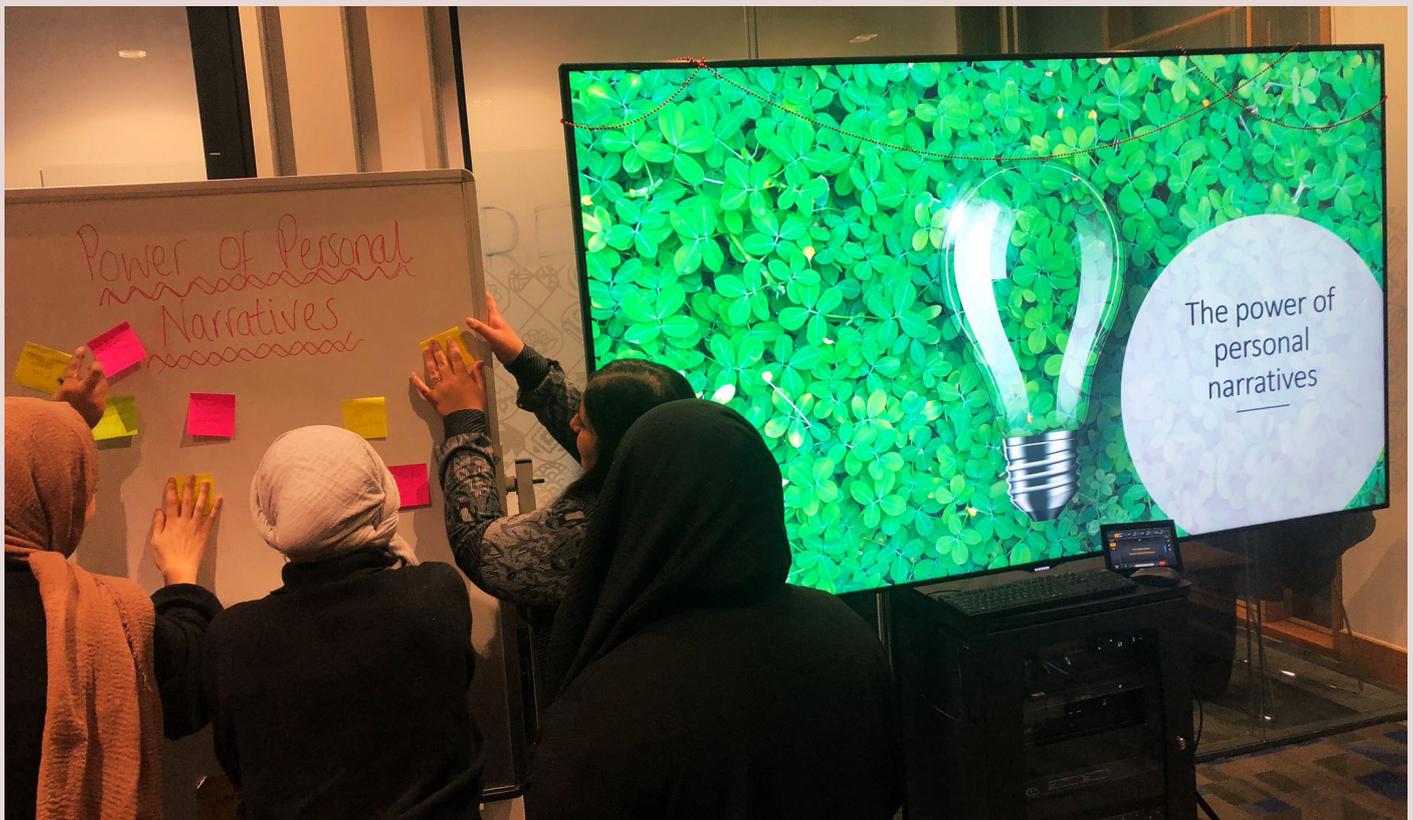
Workshop One: 27 January 2020



Workshop packs, provided to each participant.



Dr Suriyah Bi delivering the workshop.



Participants stick post-it notes on the board detailing what personal narratives mean to them.



Attendees at the first workshop.



Group discussions at the first workshop.

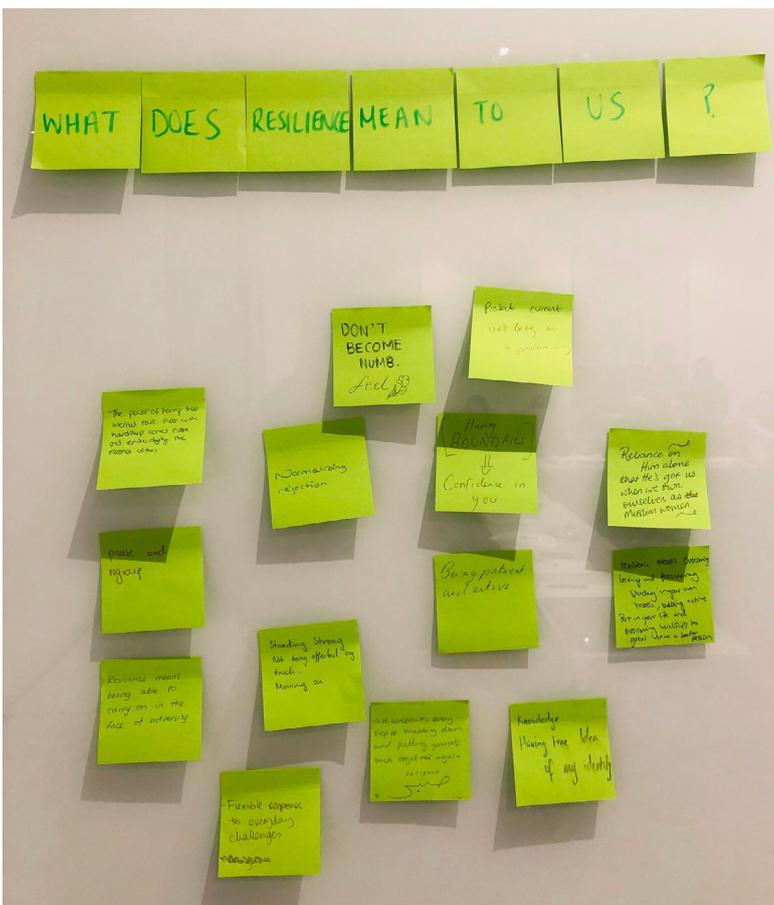
Workshop Two: 10 February 2020



Workshop packs and slides.



Attendees having paired discussions.



Participants were asked to write what resilience meant to them on a post-it note, which was put up on the board and shared with all attendees.





5.2 Muslim Women Connect: The Power of Tailored Mentoring

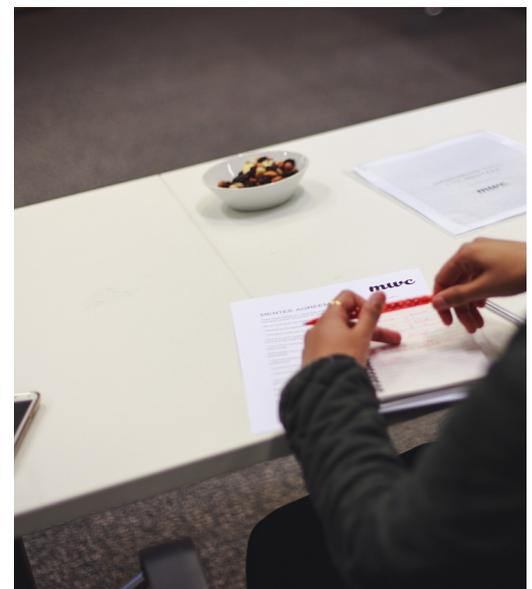
Muslim Women Connect is an initiative that brings together Muslim women from a broad range of careers and different walks of life in order to network, connect with one another, and nurture the next generation of Muslim women.

Muslim Women Connect also offer service users rich and varied programs with the aim to inspire confidence and guide career development. Services include our mentoring programme, school speakers program, workshops, master classes, and a holistic approach to networking. Some of MWC's events and activities are showcased in the images below.

As the research findings suggest, talent is being lost between the ages of 14-22 which indicates a real need for tailored mentoring to be provided in the early stages of development of Muslim women. It is initiatives such as MWC that require funding from both governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to be able to deliver targeted mentoring from the age of 14 and above.



Mentees attending a mentoring session.



MWC Mentee Packs



Mentees attending a panel event organised by MWC.



Discussions during an MWC event.

6. Conclusion

In a climate where Islamophobic anti-Muslim sentiment is high and ever-increasing, and when community cohesion, integration, and multiculturalism are sore topics, exploring the experiences of Muslim women to learn of their success and challenges in contributing to the economy, cannot be more timely. The research study is the largest and most comprehensive of its kind exploring Muslim women's experiences of work and career development anywhere in the world. Findings illustrate a significant breadth and depth of challenges faced by Muslim women with more than 78% of Muslim women, having experienced more than one challenge in their journeys of work and career development. Further, while nearly half of participants' (46.8%) household incomes were below the 2018 national average household income of £28,400 (Office for National Statistics: 2019), 52% of participants held postgraduate qualifications, and 84.2% of British Muslim women were actively engaged in the labour market, suggesting that Muslim women are highly competent and skilled. These data sets also indicate to high levels of resilience and determination exhibited by Muslim women.

While broadly speaking this data points towards socio-economic factors that limit Muslim women, the mixed methods research approach allowed for further nuance. It was found that factors such as a dominating culture of alcohol consumption, a lack of confidence, a lack of career advice, a lack of opportunity, discrimination (gender, religion and ethnicity based), and family and partner expectations, were significant limiting factors experienced by British Muslim women. At a closer inspection, 47.2% of women stated they had encountered Islamophobia and discrimination as a challenge in the workplace. Participants provided details of experiencing hostility due to wearing their hijab, being subjected to insensitive comments and statements, being treated as the 'spokesperson' for Muslims during terrorist attacks, the workplace and career consequences of becoming pregnant, the way in which some were perceived to be placing greater value in maintaining a family life, the realities and impact of the gender pay-gap, aggressive behaviour and treatment from male colleagues and/or superiors, the severe impact of poverty and/or lack of finances and/or coming from a disadvantaged background. Participants also spoke about family and partner expectations, which were often embedded within cultural norms, as also limiting their development. Together these factors suggest a plethora of social forces at play in what can be seen as the stunted work and career development of Muslim women.

In order to address and mitigate the negative impacts of these factors for British Muslim women, strategies to combat must be well-thought out, specific, and targeted. In other words, it is not simply sufficient to argue 'we need more mentoring services' rather, we must streamline mentoring services as a well-rounded service that include paid internships, shadowing in the workplace, confidence building workshops, networking sessions including networking skills workshops. At the same time, it is crucial we develop training packages for our educational institutions and workplaces to become champions of diversity and inclusion, and accommodate for British Muslim women. These recommendations will go a long way in ensuring that the aspirations held by Muslim women at secondary school materialise into attained employment upon graduation.

Since participants stated family and partner expectations to also be a limiting factor, it is paramount to also devise educational material for families to become more understanding of the diverse possibilities in career options. However, an alarming finding was the attitudes held by spouses and/or potential spouses towards participants as to the nature of employment, the way in which this could be performed, and the spaces in which they were able to carry out employment. British Muslim women stressed that they wanted to be able to marry and have children, and saw this integral to their agency, however, a small but nonetheless significant number of participants expressed that this may not be available to

them due to being labelled as 'career women'. It was beyond the scope of the research to enquire as to the views of Muslim men, however, the principal researcher has developed this initial project into a post doctorate research project at Yale University, which explores the experiences of both British and American Muslim men and women in the workplace. Studying attitudes and behaviours towards marriage and career development forms a sub-question in the post-doctorate research. It is hoped that the comparative findings of the forthcoming research will further inform both grassroots initiatives and policies, to address challenges faced by British Muslims more broadly.

7. Appendices

a. Information Sheet

“Muslim Women’s experiences of work and career development”
Information Sheet for Interview Participants

Principal Researcher: Suriyah Bi, PhD Candidate University College London.

Contact Details: suriyah.bi.15@ucl.ac.uk

Details of the Study:

I am a researcher working with Muslim Women Connect to conduct the largest study of its kind exploring Muslim women’s experiences of work, and career development.

The study will look at the ways Muslim women are supported with work and career development, the challenges experienced they experience, things they have found helpful when for work and career development, whether Muslim women experience discrimination in the workplace, and what can be done to improve or help Muslim women to have better work and career development outcomes.

This project is not financed by funders.

When completing the survey, you indicated that you would like to participate in one-to-one interviews and/or focus groups. As a result, I am providing you this information sheet so that you can learn about the research and ask any questions that you may have.

The survey has so far had 315 responses. Of these, 100 women have indicated that they wish to participate in focus groups and/or interviews. We aim to interview about 100 Muslim women.

The collected information from the survey, focus groups, and one-to-one interviews will be used to write a report. The report will be presented in Parliament and made available via the Muslim Women Connect website for free. The results may also be used in published research articles in academic journals and academic presentations, by the principal researcher.

All participants that take part in the survey, focus group and one-to-one interviews, will be anonymised.

Participation in the interview should take about 45-60 minutes. Participation is on an entirely voluntary basis. This means that you don’t have to participate if you don’t want to, and you can tell me at any time if you don’t want to answer a question I ask, or if you want to leave the interview.

Anything you tell me in the interview is confidential, which means that no-one will know that you have shared that information with me, unless you explicitly want me to use your name or your personal information when I analyse the information, offer presentations or publish reports. The information that I will share with the other researchers will not include your name or any personal information that they could use to know who you are. Any notes that I take during or after the interview will be kept safely on my computer that only I can access – this is because I will use a password that only I know to be able to turn the computer on and to be able to open the document on the computer. If you allow me to record the interview, I will destroy the recording as soon as I have written up the notes on my computer, so that no-one apart from me can listen to the recording.

If at any time and for any reason you would rather not answer a question, please let me know. If at any time you would like the interview to stop, please let me know and we will stop. We can take a break, stop and continue later or on another day, or stop altogether. If you decide to stop at any time, that is fine. Participation in the research project is entirely separate from the provision of public or governmental services, and that there will be no material benefit from participating in the research.

The research aims to improve our knowledge of the experiences of Muslim women and inform the future development of policies and practices that will hopefully enhance the wellbeing of Muslim women. However, individuals participating in the project will not receive enhanced access to assistance, opportunities or the fast-tracking of legal procedures or work opportunities. By participating in the project, we will be able to include your and other opinions about the experiences of Muslim women in work and career development.

If you would like me to share my research findings with you, I will be happy to do so through a form a communication that suits you best (i.e. email, discuss findings through a telephone call, or a face-to-face meeting). When the report is published, I will share this with you.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. If you do decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

If you do agree to take part, I would like to record this interview to make sure that I remember everything that you tell me correctly. I will listen to the recording again this evening/tomorrow and will write some notes on my computer; after I have written the notes, I will destroy the recording so that no-one else can listen to it. If you don't want me to record the interview, that is fine. We can still go ahead with the interview even if you don't want to be taped. After I have written up the notes on the computer, I will transfer the notes – which will not include your name – to the principal researcher. All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the UK's Data Protection Act 1998.

In summary:

- A decision to withdraw at any time, or decision not to take part, will not affect the services you receive.
- You will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form or provide verbal consent if you do not wish to sign.
- As participation is anonymous it will not be possible for us to withdraw your data after we have completed the transcription of the interview this evening/tomorrow.
- Recorded interviews will be transcribed (written up) and the tape will then be wiped clear.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering take part in this research.



b. Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. Before you agree to take part, the person organising the research must explain the project to you. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you to decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Consent Form

Research Title: “Muslim Women’s experiences of work and career development.”

Purpose of Study: “Look at the ways Muslim women are supported in relation to work and career development, the challenges experienced, things they have found helpful in work and career development, whether Muslim women experience discrimination in the workplace, and what can be done to improve or help Muslim women to have better work and career development outcomes.”

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

I have read and understood the project information sheet dated: / /

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and have received satisfactory answers to questions, and any other additional details requested.

I agree to take part in the project by agreeing to be interviewed.

I agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

I understand that I do not have to provide answers to questions if I do not wish to.

I understand that my taking part is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time, and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.

I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored; and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.

Where the research will be written up as a published report, I understand how personal data included in that report will be published and stored.

I have also been given a few moments to decide whether I want to go ahead with the interview today.

I understand that I can withdraw my interview from the research at any point.

I agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant [printed]:

Signature:

Date:

Name of Researcher [printed]:

Signature:

Date:

Project contact details for further information:

Suriyah Bi, PhD Candidate: suriyah.bi.15@ucl.ac.uk

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To cite this report or any of its content please use the following format:

Bi, S. 2020. *Empowered Employment: Unlocking the Workplace for Muslim Women*. *Muslim Women Connect*.



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